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## A WOMAN'S DIARY.

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### PART I.

*May, 1872.*

WHEN I was at the convent, my quarterly reports almost invariably ended with this definition of my moral character : "Happy disposition, sound mind, gravity beyond her years, well-balanced nature. Conscience, however, a little uneasy."

"Conscience a little uneasy"—I do not deny it ; but as to the rest, asking pardon of these ladies, I must be allowed to assert the direct opposite. And as my beloved instructresses were mistaken, it is not astonishing that the world should be deceived also. I fancy that the cause of these false judgments is my external appearance. I am a dark brunette and pale ; my expression, of a tiresome unchangeability, is as severe as that of a young girl can be. Somewhat pronounced near-sightedness lends a look of sleepy indifference to my black eyes (whose brilliancy would without this troublesome circumstance certainly be too striking). Besides, I have naturally a calm manner of speaking, walking, sitting, and of moving noiselessly, which gives an observer an illusory impression of tranquil serenity. I have neither the desire nor the means of correcting the opinion of the public in this respect ; and, until there is a new order of things, my locked diary alone will know that this grave, wise, and well-balanced Charlotte is at heart an excessively romantic and impulsive young person.

And this is precisely why I am so late in beginning this magnificent locked diary, which I so enthusiastically bought three days after I left the convent, and which has waited three years for my first confidences. Twenty times have I seated myself before its white pages, burning—like King Midas's barber—to intrust my secrets to them; twenty times my "uneasy conscience" has made me throw aside my pen. This conscience said to me that I was about to undertake an imprudent and foolish thing; that the habit of recording my impressions, of analysing my emotions, of nursing my dreams and giving substance to them, would have one inevitable consequence—that of bringing to the surface those romantic and passionate depths which are dangerous to a woman, which might prove fatal to the repose and dignity of my life, and which I ought rather to force myself unceasingly to suppress and extinguish.

Something my grandmother said this evening has, thank heaven! removed these scruples. We had had some people to dinner. Afterwards we played the game of "secretary," which consists of writing questions on slips of paper, folding them, and shaking them together in a basket; each player draws a question by chance, and replies to it as best he may. But one of our guests, a young deputy, who prides himself on his profundity, always managed in some way to keep his own question in order to reply to it the more brilliantly. On one occasion he asked himself, "What kind of a woman best performs her duty?" I was charged with the collection of the little slips, and I read his question and at the same time his reply, which was worded thus: "The woman who best performs her duty is one who does not seek romance in life, for no real good comes of it; who does not seek poetry in it, for duty is not poetic; who does not seek in it passion, for passion is only a polite name for vice."

A concert of flattering murmurs, in which I had the



cowardice to join, greeted this elegant maxim, during which the author betrayed his incognito by a modest smile. He was disconcerted, however, by an exclamation from my grandmother, who had abruptly suspended her netting. "Oh! oh! pardon me!" cried she, "but I cannot let such heresies pass before these young women. Under pretext of making dutiful women, would you make fools, young puritan? In the first place, I do not understand this mania for always opposing passion to duty—passion on this side, duty on that—as if one were necessarily the opposite of the other. But we can put passion into duty, and we not only can, but ought; and I would even say, my dear sir, that this is the secret of the lives of virtuous women, for duty all by itself is very dry, I assure you. You say that it is not poetic. That is certainly my opinion, but it must become so before any one can take pleasure in it; and it is precisely in rendering vulgar duty poetic that these romantic dispositions, against which you hurl your anathemas, serve us. If you ever marry, choose a woman who is not romantic, and see what will come of it."

"What will come of it?" asked the young deputy.

"Well, it will turn out that everything in her life will seem flat and insipid—her husband first, if you will excuse me; then her fireside, her children, even her religion. Ah! surely it is not against romantic ideas that the present generation has need of guarding itself, my dear sir, I assure you; the danger for the moment is not there; we do not perish from enthusiasm, we perish from platitude. But to return to our humble sex, which is alone in question: look at the women whom they talk about in Paris—I mean those whom they talk about too much; is it their poetic imagination that blinds them? Is it the search for the ideal that misleads them? Ah, great heaven, three-fourths of them have the emptiest brains and the barrenest imaginations in creation!

Ladies, and especially you young ladies," added my grandmother, "believe me, do not fetter yourselves. Be enthusiastic, be as romantic as you choose. Try to have a grain of poetry in your heads; you will be the more easily virtuous and the more surely happy. Poetic sentiment at the fireside of a woman is like music and incense in a church; it is the charm of right living!"

So spoke my dear grandmother, God bless her! and that is why I have at last opened, at midnight, and in peace with my conscience, my precious locked diary, and why I dare say to myself, "Good-night, romantic and impulsive Charlotte!"

*May 20th.*

Yesterday I was in my boudoir, torturing my piano and perfecting myself in my vocal exercises, when Cécile de Stèle, my friend from childhood and my dearest companion at the convent, rushed in like a whirlwind, as usual, seized my hands, turned her two rosy cheeks to me, and said, in her vehement and affectionate way, "Charlotte, are you always and ever my dear sister, my guide, my support, my little spiritual mother, my golden heart, and my ivory tower?"

"Why this litany, dear?"

"Because you can do me an immense service. Fancy that my father is going away—"

"The general going to leave Paris?"

"Oh! only for a few weeks. He is going to make a tour of inspection in the provinces. Meanwhile he sends me into the country, to my aunt De Louverey, in the department of the Eure, in the heart of the woods. My aunt is the best of women, but she lives alone in her château with her son, my cousin Roger, you know? who has been half mad ever since he was so frightfully wounded in the war; poor fellow! he has no longer a human figure—no arms, no legs! It is the greatest pity, you know, but—you can fancy what a house-

hold it is! So I said to my father, 'I will go, but it will be exile, despair, it will be death—at least unless you allow me to take Charlotte d'Erra with me!' 'Take Charlotte d'Erra with you then,' said my father—and therefore I take you!"

"But, my dear little—"

"Ah! do not say no, I beg of you, or I shall expire at your feet! Make this sacrifice for me. Besides, who knows? we may not be so much bored, after all; between us we shall manage to amuse ourselves, we can ride on horseback, we can play duets. And then, too, there must be some neighbours round about there. Well, my dear, we will turn their heads, you with your insolent beauty, I with my little ideas, with all that—I don't know what—which is my own peculiar property, and which people commonly call 'go.'"

I frowned and said, in my gravest contralto, "What's that you say, Cécile?"

She stood up on tiptoe with an air of bravado, and, showing me her little pointed teeth, she repeated, "go!"

"Who ever taught you such a slang term as that?"

"My father!" she replied.

"I fancy your mother would scold your father very much if she were living."

She looked at me fixedly with her large, clear eyes, which filled with tears; she kissed my hands, and resumed in a low, supplicating tone, "You will come, will you not?"

"But, my darling, I cannot leave my grandmother."

"Your grandmother! I take her also. I have thought of everything; I have written to my aunt, and here is a most pressing invitation, in her own handwriting, for your grandmother. Take me to her!"

Two minutes later, Cécile bounded into the drawing-room, pushing the door open abruptly; my grandmother, whom the least noise startles, sprang trembling to her feet. "Ah! good heavens! there has been an accident! I am sure

something has happened. Tell me at once; what is it? what is it?"

"It is a letter from my aunt De Louvercy, madame."

"Ah! poor Madame de Louvercy! Poor woman! How is she? What trials she has had! And her poor son! Ah! poor souls! Well, what does she want of me!"

"If you will have the goodness to read, madame?"

My dear grandmother read the letter and resumed a thoughtful air; when she raised her eyes, she saw Cécile kneeling at her feet upon the carpet, her hands clasped, and her pretty, dimpled face upturned towards her.

"Really now! just fancy that!" said my grandmother. "Bless her little heart!"

"You will go, madame?" inquired Cécile.

"Really! my dear child," replied my grandmother, kissing her forehead, "I must say that as a general rule I greatly dislike moving about; I have even a profound horror of doing so. But, on the one hand, I see this is a little holiday arranged between you and Charlotte; and, on the other, Madame de Louvercy sends me such a pressing and affectionate appeal; she inspires me besides with so much compassion, poor woman! . . . But, understand me well, my beauty, when I do go on a visit, I like to be sure of stopping for a certain time. As for going to a place in order to come away again, to unpack my trunks just to repack them, without stopping to take breath: none of that for me! I most certainly would not wish to force myself upon your aunt, but let us see—how long is this invitation for?"

"For as long as you please, madame; six weeks—two months."

"Ah! very good! that is even too much!" said my grandmother:

In short, it was agreed that the Countess d'Erra and I should go in about a fortnight, and join my friend Cécile, who

started yesterday, at Louvercy. A fortnight will hardly be enough for our preparations, which are considerable, as one can judge by this simple detail, that my grandmother will take with her, her large folding screen, in order to protect herself from the draughts which, she says, must rage in an old château. I superintend this astonishing packing with apparent tranquillity, dreaming secretly the while of a belfry, a northern tower, of galleries full of ancestors and ghosts, and also of that poor mutilated and suffering being who doubtless mingles his complaints with the moanings of the wind in the long corridors. All this, alas ! enchants me.

*May 28th.*

I received this morning a letter from Cécile, which presents the sojourn at Louvercy in new colours—less sombre, but perhaps less attractive to me. Here it is, word for word:

*“Château de Louvercy, May 27th.*

“My dearest, you are going to shudder—it was all a plot! Who can we trust henceforth? My father, my aunt, both so generally esteemed, whose lives up to this time have been so irreproachable, have united in a dark conspiracy against a weak child !

“It was Monday ; at five o'clock in the evening, I arrive at the station (where, parenthetically, there is a blind man who plays the *Marseillaise* upon his *flageolet* ; I tell you this, that you may stop at this station and not at any other). I arrive, then, at the station and fall into the arms of my aunt. ‘My dear aunt!’ ‘My dear niece, how do you do?’ We get into the carriage. Before we had exchanged four words, I felt some mystery in the air—embarrassment on the part of my aunt, mysterious language, covert allusions. There are a few people at the château ; they feared it would be too wearisome for me before the arrival of my friend Charlotte. ‘Ah, my dear aunt, can you think so?’ They have gathered

a little circle of companions suitable to my age ; two young women, relatives of the late M. de Louverey, Mesdames de Sauves and de Chagres. 'Thank you, aunt.' Then their husbands—'Bravo, aunt !' And the two brothers of these ladies, very agreeable young men, remarkably agreeable—(aside uneasily) 'Ahem ! ahem !' (aloud with indifference) 'Indeed, aunt ?' 'And tell me, have you brought some pretty dresses ?'—'Ordinary ones, aunt, I was far from expecting to find any one with you !'—'At your age, my child, one should always be prepared !'

"Do you seize the situation, my beauty ? Does the conspiracy dawn upon you ? Can you see the picture spread out before you ?

"At last we enter the court-yard of the château ; in the centre is a small pond, with some swans floating upon its surface, and near by are Mesdames de Sauves and de Chagres, with their husbands and their 'remarkable' brothers, forming an interesting family group. I bow, I blush, I spring to the ground ; I embrace Mesdames de Sauves and de Chagres, and I run off quickly to change my dress, while each repeats behind me : 'She is charming ! she is charming !'

"My suspicions, which were inordinately awakened from the first moment, were gradually confirmed that same evening, the next day, and the days following. My aunt's sinister château is suddenly transformed ; it is an abode of pleasure, an enchanted dwelling, the scene of delightful fêtes and chivalrous tournaments, with a vague odour of orange-blossoms in the by-ways. Walks in the morning, eavalescades in the afternoon, dances and charades in the evening. Personally I am spoiled, indulged, idolised. My tastes are consulted, my least desires are understood, divined, fulfilled, before I express them. There is a touching emulation. I secretly wish for a bouquet of camellias ; behold it ! A box of bonbons from Boissier's ; behold it ! A red parrot ; behold

the parrot! A gilded cage to put it in; behold the cage!  
The moon; behold the moon!

"You see, my dearest, how grave the circumstances are. There is no longer the shadow of a doubt. My perfidious aunt and my guilty father have resolved to marry me at once. There are two aspirants, between whom I am given a choice. Allow me to present them to you. Mesdames de Sauves and de Chagres have each a brother, and these two young men, who are consins, bear the same family name, MM. René and Henri de Valnesse. Here I am reminded of the historical parallels in which you excelled at the convent (between Charles V. and Francis I. for example; do you remember? 'If the one was the more skilful politician, the other was the braver warrior,' etc.). To apply to MM. de Valnesse this figure of rhetoric, I will tell you that, if the one is dark, the other is fair; that if the one finds double eye-glasses necessary, the other makes use of a single glass; that one sings sentimental ballads which make me weep, and the other comic songs which make me laugh; that both look equally well on foot and on horseback; that both are good waltzers, agreeable in conversation, perfectly cultivated, possessed of equal fortunes, and both, if I can believe certain appearances, equally disposed to place these fortunes at the feet of the innocent person who writes these lines.

"You will ask, 'Is your choice made?' No, my angel, my choice is not made. They please me very nearly in the same degree; and, as I cannot marry both, I await the wise Charlotte, that I may take her advice and feel a preference. 'Thy choice will be my choice, and thy god will be my god!' Come, then, my dearest, without delay; for this suspense is terrible, and you understand that there would be little humanity in leaving the tenderest of friends in so violent a situation any longer.

CÉCILE DE STÈLE.

"P.S.—All this time my poor cousin Roger remains

sombre and savage in his tower, and goes out only to drive about the country in a dog-cart, to which he has the most vicious horses attached. My aunt pretends that he chooses them on purpose, and that he wishes to kill himself. Very sad, is it not? Farewell, dearest; come quickly."

This letter has troubled me very much. Cécile is almost a sister to me. Although we are of the same age, there has always been a slight maternal tinge in the affection I have felt for her. The great event which is preparing for her fills me with emotion and joy, but also with anxiety. I wish so much that she may be happy! She thoroughly deserves to be, dear child! Her nature is so affectionate, so gracious, so sincere! Her head is a little giddy, perhaps, but her heart is sound and pure, always submissive, always prompt to repent. There is in her, as she is fond of saying, something of the angel and the demon, but particularly of the angel. This frivolous, impulsive, affectionate creature seems to me, more than most women, to need to be well married, well loved, and well guided.

I greatly dread, therefore, the responsibility that her loving confidence imposes upon me. I am very young and very inexperienced to direct the choice on which her destiny depends. At least I shall throw into it all my zeal and all my conscience. It seems to me that I shall be more exacting for her than I would be for myself even. MM. de Valnesse will do well to be on their guard. Behold, here cometh the archangel with the flaming sword who watches at the gate of paradise!

Château de Louverey, *June 6th.*

My dream is realised; there is a northern tower, and my room is actually in it! It is charming! But let us proceed in order. My grandmother and I arrived this afternoon. On getting out of the train, we saw at once the blind man and



his flageolet ; then Madame de Louvercy and Cécile in an open landau ; also, two cavaliers earaeoling about in the little square before the station, calming by voice and hand their horses, which the whistle of the engine had frightened. By a furtive glance from Cécile, I recognised the two aspirants to her hand, and I made a curious inspection of their persons, while they apparently paid ~~the~~ the same compliment. My first impression was favourable. The two faces are reassuring, gay, and frank—the faces of honest men. My heart is easier on that score.

We rolled along over the white road, in the midst of a cloud of dust, with a cavalier at each door of the carriage as escort. Normandy apple-trees, with their clusters of pink blossoms, lined the way on the right and left. The sky was of a delicate, opaline blue. Cécile, in a toilet of the colour of the heavens, fairly beamed with pleasure, pressed my hands, and threw a smile, now on this side, now on that, to maintain a balance, and we were happy. How pleasant it is to live sometimes !

I had not seen Madame de Louvercy for several years. She has grown astonishingly old. Her hair is quite white, forming a marvellous frame for her beautiful, sad face. Under her eyes she has two bluish furrows, which have certainly been caused by tears. She speaks little of her griefs, and generally only by allusion. On the way to the château I heard her telling my grandmother how the unfortunate condition of her son had absorbed her entirely for a long time ; but that she ought to have remembered that Cécile had no longer a mother, and that she had a duty towards her also to perform. All this was said in a tone of extreme reserve, without dwelling upon it, and with a smile of kindly welcome, very touching amidst all this inconsolable sadness. The poor woman is so much the more to be pitied as her son was charming, they say, before he met with this horrible wound, which has mutilated, crippled, and disfigured him.

The noise of the wheels is suddenly deadened by the turf and moss ; we enter the avenue under a mass of foliage, at the end of which I see the elegant and severe façade of the château, in the Renaissance style I believe. Here is the court-yard, which is at the same time a flower garden ; there the swans which flap their wings at our approach ; Mesdames de Sauves and de Chagres, who wave their handkerchiefs under the veranda, while their husbands throw away their cigars and wave their hats. It is a triumph ! They are very agreeable to look upon, these two young couples, and they promise well.

A moment after, my grandmother and I are installed in our apartments by Cécile. While I brush off the dust of the journey, she interrogates me feverishly : “ Well ! Tell me quickly, at a glance, what do you think of them ? ”

“ At a glance, I like them much ; they seem very charming.”

“ Truly ?—let me embrace you ! but which do you prefer—tell me quickly, the fair or the dark one, M. René or M. Henri ? ”

“ So far I prefer neither the one nor the other ; and you, little one—”

“ Did I not write you that I should wait for your decision before I could feel a preference ? You are to tell me which you prefer, and I will accept him.”

“ I assure you, Cécile, your confidence appalls me.”

“ Listen. I am going to place you between the two gentlemen at dinner ; you are to study them, to sound them thoroughly, do you understand ? I will tell you what I want to know, and upon what you are to examine them particularly, and after dinner you are to render me a strict account of the result. Well, now, I desire to know first which of the two has the more true and enduring affection for me ; then—and this is very important—which has the better disposition ; then, which is the more intelligent and cultivated, for I de-

sire a husband who will do me honour; then, which possesses the more generous and charitable nature—I think much of this detail; then, which is fonder of travel, for I consider that important also; then which—do not laugh, Charlotte, it is very serious!”

“I laugh, Cécile, because you really ask too much for a single sitting. Still I will exert all my energies towards it. I will do my best.”

Cécile leaves me with my maid, and I prepare myself for dinner. I put on a very simple dress, the modest toilet of a confidant; dark colours, square-necked body, lace, and a red rose in my hair, in the Spanish fashion. I am not a fright, and that suffices.

Before the second bell sounds, I have time enough left to examine my apartment. It surpasses my hopes. It is a chamber worthy of a captive princess, all hung in grand, old, mysterious tapestries, and having deep-set windows, like a chapel. I am, as I have said, in the north tower; this tower is a very high, square pavilion, with a feudal aspect, and of a much more ancient date than the rest of the château, of which it forms the right wing. It is especially dedicated to the use of M. Roger de Louvercy, who can more easily satisfy his taste for solitude and isolation there. They even raised, a while ago, a transverse trellis, disguised as a palisade, which serves as a barrier, so to speak, between the château and the tower, and which enables this unfortunate young man to live completely by himself, when it suits him, as is always the case when his mother is not alone, for he has taken an unhappy fancy that to everybody but his mother he is an object of horror and disgust. Several buildings, recently constructed, form a special court-yard for him, where he has his stables and kennels, and which has an egress into the open country. He can thus go and come without passing through the principal court-yard.

M. Roger occupies the apartments upon the ground-floor, while my grandmother and I are upon the first story. We were admitted into this sacred place, as Cécile says, as being the most quiet of the guests. We are, besides, in communication with the château by corridors on each story, and can move about freely without risk of meeting M. de Louverey. Cécile, however, has warned us that he sometimes goes up to the second story to work in his library; "But," added she, "nothing will be easier for you than to avoid him, poor boy! You will hear his crutch on the staircase."

Notwithstanding this safeguard, I confess I secretly promised myself to take the first opportunity to look at this sombre deformity; my curiosity has just this moment been satisfied, and at the same time punished, for my sympathetic compassion for his great misfortune can hardly survive the shock of what I have seen and heard. The window of my dressing-room opens upon the little court-yard, where the stables, reserved for the special use of M. de Louverey, are. I had just fastened the red rose in my lace, when this court-yard suddenly resounded with a confused tumult of trampling, barking, shouting, and impatient clamour, and, I must add, of frightful swearing. I drew aside the curtain slightly, and I saw, first, two enormous Newfoundland dogs jumping up at the head of a horse which was all white with sweat and foam; then, a kind of basket dog-cart, and in it M. de Louverey, very easily recognisable by his mutilated arm and leg. As for his face, I could distinguish only two long blonde moustaches, drawn down, in Tartar fashion. M. de Louverey was calling in a furious tone two servants, who doubtless did not expect him so soon, and who were running like mad. He greeted them with a volley of savage words, during which they assisted him to alight from the dog-cart. I quickly dropped the curtain, and saw nothing more. I was overcome; this shocking sight destroyed all the effect produced on me by

his great misfortune. My dear neighbour, we shall not be very neighbourly !

At last we are at table. Cécile has placed me, according to her programme, between the two young rivals. I have the dark M. de Valnesse on my right, and the fair M. de Valnesse on my left ; an arrangement, by-the-way, which seems rather to astonish Madame de Louvercy. Cécile sits opposite us, in order the better to watch my operations. She is beside the curé of Louvercy, whom she endeavours to make laugh each time he drinks. She laughs heartily herself, at the same time warning me with her eyes to do my duty. She evidently thinks that I am showing a little weakness. The truth is, I am meeting with unforeseen difficulties ; MM. de Valnesse are both very polite, but they do not lend themselves to my investigation ; they hardly reply to me ; something seems to paralyse them ; they look at me with a sort of uneasy stupor ; they appear much pre-occupied with the red rose in my hair. But that is not the point, gentlemen.

We were hardly out of the dining-room when Cécile drew me aside. " Well ! what have you discovered ? "

" That they are timid ; that is something already. "

" Timid ! " echoed Cécile, " because you do not encourage them enough. You must encourage them if you want them to gain confidence and become familiar. "

That appeared reasonable to me. I did encourage them gently, and, in fact, with the aid of the coffee, I found them becoming pliable, little by little. They both sang for me. Both asked me to waltz repeatedly, and after each waltz I kept them a moment for a chat. Meanwhile Cécile wandered about in the strangest fashion, now bursting into causeless laughter, now tossing the music about on the piano ; suddenly she disappeared, and, fearing that she was not well, I went after her.

I caught sight of her through the dusk of the twilight, in the court-yard of the château; she was walking very rapidly, like a person taking exercise after a bath. When I approached, she pretended not to see me, and continued her walk, turning her back upon me. I called her : "Cécile !"

"What ?"

"Are you suffering ?"

"No."

"Well ! what is the matter ?"

"Nothing !"

I looked in her face, and she repeated : "No, nothing ! nothing, at least, that I ought not to have foreseen, if I had had the least sense. As soon as you arrive with your goddess-like face, it stands to reason that I am overlooked ! Oh ! of course it is not your fault that you were made like that ; I reproach you with nothing : that is to say, begging your pardon, you could dispense with coquetry, my dear. When a woman is as beautiful as you are, and a coquette into the bargain, then good-bye ! nothing more is possible."

"Truly, Céile, I do not know whether to laugh or to be angry. What does this mean ? You beg me, you beseech me, you supplicate me, to study these two young men—"

"Well, you study 'these two young men' too much, and they study you too much !"

"Indeed ! Do you wish me to return home, then ?"

She seized my hands. "Oh ! no !" After a pause, becoming tender, she added, "I am stupid, am I not ?" Then she threw her head on my breast and burst into tears. I quieted her as one would a child, and she suddenly resumed all her vivacity and habitual tenderness. "Listen—I have a superb idea : you shall choose for yourself the one who pleases you most, and I will take the other. We will be cousins, almost sisters, it will be delicious ! Besides, it is right that you should

choose before me, you are my superior in every respect ! It is quite right ! quite right !”

“Dearest, you are the best little soul in the world, but I cannot accept your arrangement. And be sure of this : MM. de Valnesse are, and always will be, to me only the aspirants to your hand ; this title gives them in my eyes an absolutely sacred character, and forbids any personal pretension even in thought. It seems to me it would be a gross offence to both delicacy and friendship. Do you believe me ? Are you reassured ?”

“I believe you. I adore you ! Come and continue your studies.”

We returned to the drawing-room, where I continued my studies, but with more moderation, since zeal has its dangers.

The old belfry-bell sounds—what a charm there is in the night and in the woods ! Great heavens ! two o'clock in the morning ! Are you not ashamed, mademoiselle ?

*June 12th.*

Is movement synonymous with pleasure, and is it enough to be stirring to be amused ? If this is so, then I am too much amused. “What shall we do this morning ? What shall we do this afternoon ? What shall we do this evening ?” This is the refrain of the house ; and behold us setting out on foot, on horseback, in the carriage, regardless of everything, full of life ! A spirit of laughter accompanies us, returns with us, sits at table, dances and sings with us, and does not leave us even in the passages. •

This morning early I wished to refresh myself by a solitary walk in the park. I descended from my tower with cat-like step, and when I had reached the middle of the staircase I suddenly heard the sharp sound of a crutch on the steps below, warning me of the approach of M. de Louvercy, who was apparently on the way to his library. I held my breath for

a moment. I was about to bravely turn my back and take refuge in my room, but there was no longer time. We were face to face, M. Roger and I. Suddenly perceiving me, he became pale, as if he had seen a ghost. He made an embarrassed gesture as if to bow, and in his confusion he let fall his unfortunate crutch, which rolled down the staircase. I cannot describe the expression of profound distress depicted upon his face: it was a mixture of grief, humiliation, and anger. He held the baluster firmly with his right hand, while his mutilated left arm and shortened leg remained in air, without support. I hastily descended the stairs, and picking up the crutch, returned quickly, and replaced it under his arm. He fixed his dark-blue eyes upon me, and said, in a low, grave voice, "I thank you!" Then he continued his way and I mine.

This little scene has restored my interest in him. In the first place, I knew he made a tremendous effort to spare me a volley of the soldier-like imprecations of which he appears so prodigal. Then, too, in spite of the involuntary antipathy with which deformed beings generally inspire me, I am far from finding him so repulsive as Cécile had described him. He is, so to say, one-armed, and one leg is shortened and seemingly paralysed; but his face is handsome and refined, and the slight scar on his forehead does not disfigure him. He has, it is true, a shy and rather bewildered look, which is more particularly noticeable on account of the careless state of his hair, and of his long, too long moustaches.

I was entering the park, when Cécile perceived me from her window; three minutes after, she was treading the grass by my side, hopping along like a bird. I told her of my meeting with her cousin.

"Ah, good gracious! how he must have sworn!"

"Not at all."

"You astonish me! The fact is, he is in better humour to-day; he expects his friend this evening."



"What friend?"

"The Commandant d'Éblis, don't you know?"

"No, I do not know—who is he?"

"I thought I had told you; it was he who saved Roger's life at Coulmiers. They had been intimate for years—ever since they were at St. Cyr. The moment Roger was struck by that bomb, M. d'Éblis carried him away in his arms like a child, in the midst of the firing and under the feet of the horses. It was glorious! And since that time he has never ceased to be perfect in Roger's eyes. He even found means to attach him to life by inducing him to write the history of this frightful war. They are both occupied with it. M. d'Éblis comes to see him often; he brings him all the documents which may be useful for his work. He is himself very highly cultivated, very learned—a staff-officer at thirty years; that is not bad!"

"But tell me, dearest, will not this fascinating person prove a third thief?"

"M. d'Éblis!" exclaimed Cécile. "Great heavens! my dear, I would as soon marry Croquemitaine himself. He is severe! he is terrible! I like him well enough, however, on account of his conduct toward Roger. But we have hardly met more than two or three times. He seems to look upon me as a baby, and I regard him as a father. But, seriously, do you not think it time to decide between MM. de Valnesse?"

"There is no great haste, it seems to me."

"I beg your pardon!"

"Your position between these two gentlemen has nothing disagreeable in it."

"Truly? You think so? and my heart, my weak heart, what do you think of that?"

"Has it spoken?"

"No, but it is impatient to speak; it burns to speak! Only give it the word!"

I saw, however, that she really did not desire a change, so I replied by some pleasantry or other, and we entered the château, whither the breakfast-bell summoned us.

The truth is, the choice between the two candidates seems to me very difficult. The result of my observations in regard to them continues to be satisfactory and embarrassing: satisfactory, because they are both endowed with the most admirable qualities; embarrassing, because these qualities, appear to me so nearly equal in both. They have the same kind of wit; in their types of character and their personal physique the points of resemblance can only be explained by their near relationship. In fact, I believe they are both the best of their kind. They are two good fellows, who have refined tastes and pleasing talents; of ordinary intelligence, but honest and with great delicacy of feeling. They bear their rivalry and their mutual pretensions with a chivalrous courtesy which is very pleasant to behold.

My trouble is, that loving Cécile so much I could wish for her an absolutely perfect husband, an exception, something unique. But would it be wise to pursue an ideal, which perhaps does not exist, when something almost as rare, and which one may never meet again, is close at hand? A man of superior intellect has nearly always, so far as my experience goes, faults of character equal to his abilities, and in proportion to his achievements. Are there not then in reality more chances of happiness in this honest mediocrity that MM. de Valnesse represent with so much grace and distinction?

My "uneasy conscience" is tortured by these great questions which interest so dear a destiny. But, upon my word, I admire the singular tranquillity of mind with which Cécile, whatever she may say, awaits my decision, in order to pronounce her own. For my part, I have certainly never found myself in a similar position; but I think I should

feel less serenity and show more personal determination. However, that remains to be seen '.

*Same day, Midnight.*

This evening has been less noisy and less frivolous than the preceding. According to Cécile, the presence of the Commandant d'Éblis has thrown cold water over us all. In my opinion it has simply raised the ordinary range of our little circle a trifle. I have often noticed the strange influence which a truly distinguished man exercises in society. He imparts, involuntarily and unwittingly, a new soul to things. Whether he speaks or is silent, it matters little; it is sufficient that he is there. All are raised more or less to his level, and seem to live more completely. He establishes a more active current and a superior plane of intercourse. The slightest incidents acquire interest, and more amusements have at once more moderation and more savour. One is restless, and yet at the same time at ease while he is present. One is often glad to see him go, yet regrets his departure and feels smaller in his absence. It is easy to perceive that less importance is attached to what is said, because he is no longer there to hear; also to what is done, because he does not know of it.

This afternoon, M. de Louvercy went to the station in his dog-cart to meet the Commandant d'Éblis; when they entered the little court-yard in front of the stables, I found myself, partly by chance and partly by curiosity, at the window of my dressing-room. I drew my curtain aside: M. d'Éblis had just jumped from the vehicle, and was holding his arms out laughingly to M. de Louvercy, who, laughing also, slid to the earth on the breast of his friend. There was in this, it seemed to me, a touching resemblance to the terrible scene at Coulmiers, and I tried to fancy the violent emotions of battle and the fever of heroism on the two faces, now so smiling and tranquil.

M. d'Éblis dined with us. He is a man of medium height and rather stiff appearance, with that grave and correct elegance which characterises officers in civil life. It must be allowed that, at a first glance, there seems to be something extremely severe and even hard in his expression; fine, cold features, sallow complexion, thick moustaches, very black and calm eyes—these are what strike one at first, and they are not very reassuring. But the slightest smile which appears imparts such an air of good-nature to his features, as inspires confidence at once. One takes courage as soon as he speaks, for his voice is singularly sweet and musical. It is a surprise and a charm to listen to this music, issuing from behind those frightful moustaches.

I had this pleasure several times during dinner, having been placed near M. d'Éblis. We both began with silence; I was timid, and perhaps at heart he was no braver than I; for, although he has his severe expression, I have mine too, and I have often remarked that I excite timidity at first. Then very suddenly, breaking the ice, "Mademoiselle," he said to me, "I have heard you spoken of a good deal to-day."

"Indeed, monsieur?"

"I have already learned that you are compassionate towards the unhappy."

"Monsieur!"

"You were kind to my poor friend Roger this morning; I know that."

"Any one in the world in my place, I am sure, would have done as I did."

"Doubtless 'any one in the world' would give alms; but it is the manner."

I told him that I was flattered by his compliment, for he ought to be a judge of good actions, since he had certainly been more useful to M. Roger than I had been, and than I could ever have an opportunity of being.

He bowed, and answered in a low, sad tone, "I am not sure that I rendered him much of a service—in bringing him out of that!"

Once started, there was no reason why we should not go on. We therefore continued our conversation, adroitly discovering each other's likes and dislikes on all topics, particularly upon the subject of Wagner's music, which he likes and I do not. A silly prank of Cécile's caused an unwelcome interruption. Cécile, who had been entirely occupied in making her curé laugh while he was drinking, was suddenly seized with the idea of riding a couple of cherries, joined by their stems, jockey-wise on her nose, holding up her pretty chin to preserve their balance. • Every one laughed, and MM. de Valnesse applauded heartily. Then, calling a servant to her, she broke the cherries apart, and, placing each on a separate plate, said, "Take that plate to M. Henri de Valnesse and this one to M. René."

While the young gentlemen gallantly placed the cherries in the button-holes of their coats, the Commandant d'Éblis watched the proceeding with wide-open eyes. Cécile noticed him and exclaimed, with her ingenuous audacity, "You seem astonished, commandant?"

"Not at all, mademoiselle."

"Pardon me, you seem very much astonished. Be frank; my little jest appears to you in very bad taste, does it not?"

"Mademoiselle, everything that you do appears to me charming."

"No; you are right: it was in very bad taste, but I will explain my character to you. It is very complicated, in some sense contradictory; and you will understand why: it is because there are within me an angel and a demon."

"In that respect, mademoiselle," said M. d'Éblis, "you have many companions. We all have an angel that we try, more or less, to listen to, and a demon that we try, more or

less, to silence. However, the demon that suggested to you to put the cherries on your nose cannot be a very wicked demon."

"Thank you, commandant," answered Cécile; "the lesson is there, but it is a kindly one. As I said this morning to your charming neighbour, you are a father to me."

M. d'Éblis bowed and smiled, and we resumed our tête-à-tête. If I can trust certain indications, this valiant soldier must be, as old epitaphs say, as good a son as he is a friend. He has a grave and tender way of saying, "My mother," which seems to me a revelation. The word is constantly on his lips. "For my mother's sake;" "my mother wished it;" "it pleases my mother." In a moment of abstraction he even let fall the word "mamma!" He reddened slightly under his tan and recalled himself; but that childish appellation, in that gentle tone, from this vigorous man, was not without charm.

After dinner, Cécile came with her unequalled grace to offer her hand to the commandant and sign a truce with him. They talked together for some time in a corner, looking towards me at intervals, so that I knew they were speaking of me. Cécile, in passing, whispered, "My dear, you have made havoc in the staff." I have no desire to create havoc; but, if this means that my person pleases him, I confess quite openly that I am very glad to hear it.

A moment after I was asked to sing something. I have a *mezzo-soprano* voice, rather strong, and well-cultivated, but I am not fond of exhibiting it in public; my reluctance is well known, and I am generally left in quiet. However, I went to the piano and began the air "Casta Diva," from "Norma." My surprise was keen, and my mortification not less so, when, after singing the first few bars, I saw the Commandant d'Éblis softly open the door of the drawing-room and disappear. I considered the proceeding rather impolite; but I

did not on that account cease singing with the conscientious care that I bring to everything I do. I had just finished in the midst of a flattering murmur, when M. d'Éblis re-entered and came towards me.

"Mademoiselle," said he, pointing to a window that had been opened on account of the heat of the evening, "Roger is out there on the bench in the court-yard. He would be infinitely obliged to you if you would repeat the air from 'Norma.'" "Willingly," I replied, and I sang the air over again with all my heart.

I was well repaid for my trouble. Madame de Louvercy, who, during the singing had remained perfectly radiant by the window, leaned out of it the moment I left the piano, and exchanged a few words with her son. Then she came towards me, took my hands, and, kissing me, said with emotion: "Thank you for him and for myself; it is the first time for a long while that I have seen a gleam of happiness in his eyes." Truly, it was a success to have brought the savage out of his den. I am proud of it, and thereupon I am going to sleep a happy woman.

*June 25th.*

I have not written for ten or twelve days. I have been seized by my old scruples; I feared to give substance to my fancies in fixing them on these pages; I was afraid of strengthening impressions which it may be wiser to let dissolve in air. Again it is my grandmother who quite unconsciously encourages me to follow my fatal inclination, and to continue my confidential relations with my locked diary and myself.

When I entered her room this morning to wish her good-day, she embraced me more tenderly than usual, and, taking one of my hands in hers, said, "Have you nothing to tell me, my child?"

"I think so, grandmamma."

"Ah! M. d'Éblis is making love to you, is he not?"

"I do not know whether M. d'Éblis is making love to me or not, dear grandmama, for he has never said a word distinctly resembling a declaration. But he seems to like to be with me; he speaks to me with a kind of respect, of confidence, and at the same time of timidity even, which I do not find in every one. He addresses all that he says to me personally, and the least thing that I say he treasures as if all my words were pearls. If that can be called 'making love' to a woman, I really believe that he is making love to me a little."

"I have noticed it," said my grandmother, gravely; "and it does not displease you?"

"No."

"No, naturally; but the mischief is not done yet, is it? You are not in love with this gentleman?"

"In love?—no."

"He simply pleases you?"

"A little."

"Yes, and so he does me. Listen, my dear child, we did not come here to find a husband, but, if we do find one, we may as well take him here as elsewhere, may we not? Only, you know, my dear little one, that an affair of this kind is very serious, and it is well to think twice. For my part, after I caught a glimpse of the attractions of this man, I did not wait three minutes to gather information from Madame de Louverey; still further, I have written to Paris. I am informed from all sides. Well, these investigations all show that there are no grave objections to him. On the contrary! But still, dear child, you know that neither my opinion nor that of others ought to influence your personal feelings; there are no serious objections, that is all; family, reputation, fortune even, are very good, very suitable. But, in spite of all that, I conjure you, dear, do not yield too quickly, too



lightly to your first impression ; take time to fathom it. I know you so well, my child ; you would be so utterly miserable if you were not happy. You are one of those who do not love twice, and it is necessary for such not to deceive themselves. When you have opened your heart to a tender sentiment—when Love, to speak plainly, has entered there, he will remain ; he will seat himself as upon a royal throne, that he will leave only with life !”

The angel that is within me, as Cécile says, had long ago softly murmured, although in terms less kindly, the truths that I heard aloud from my grandmother. It had put me on my guard ; it had warned me that my first would be my only love, all-powerful, eternal, and that I must choose well or die.

These may be only phrases ; but I believe them. To love a man who merits all my affection, all my esteem, all my respect, and to be loved by him—that is my dream ! Am I truly, truly, near its fulfilment ? Let me reflect. That a man like M. d'Éblis, of an agreeable and at the same time impressive exterior, of unexceptionable manners, of unusual merit, of a character at once heroic and tender—that a man so formed and almost perfect, should satisfy all the desires of a woman's heart, nothing, alas ! is more natural. That a young girl who feels or fancies herself honoured by the particular attentions of this distinguished person should be flattered and touched by them, that she should find a peculiar pleasure in her daily relations with this superior intelligence and this charming spirit, that she should experience a secret intoxication in the thought of changing this intimacy of a few days into an eternal union—nothing can be more simple and, still, more natural.

But what seems to me less natural and more doubtful is that a man like M. d'Éblis, who, to all appearances, can choose at his pleasure from all the world a companion worthy of him, should seriously attach himself in so short a time to

the pale and romantic Charlotte. One so easily believes what one desires ! Am I not deluding myself ? Am I not deceived by a few superficial courtesies which are addressed to me as they might be to any one ? One is in the country, one is bored, one sees Cécile entirely monopolised and engrossed while I am left alone ; one finds this a little unjust, and shows me a few attentions out of humanity. Is not that it ? Still he is incapable, unless I am greatly deceived, of disturbing a woman's peace. But how could I ever have pleased him ? By what merits ? If I have any he cannot know them. I do not reveal myself easily ; I do not tell my secrets. I say nothing to him beyond what I ought to say—mere conventionalities. I know very well that I am pretty enough, and at first sight that is undoubtedly an attraction, even to a man like him. But if there be nothing but that, how many women more beautiful than I has he not met in his life ?

Thinking the matter well over, I feel that my principal virtue in his eyes, and that which gains me his sympathy, is my obliging compassion for his poor friend Roger. Evidently his friendship for M. de Louvercy is a ruling passion with him, and he would be apt to like any one who flatters it. On the day of his arrival, I had, without at all intending it, ministered to this weakness, and since then, now that I think of it, I have had frequent opportunities of touching this fine point in his heart. It is now several days since M. Roger, thanks to M. d'Éblis's affectionate influence, became our habitual companion at table. The first time that he consented to take his place among us, at the solicitation of the commandant, the astonishment was great, and also the rejoicings, especially his mother's. The poor lady fairly beamed. He had had his hair cut, and his toilet, which is usually very much neglected, was carefully arranged. His fine face, pale and stern at first, gradually lighted up and softened in our

company, although it clouded and contracted again whenever the slightest incident recalled his infirmity, for instance, when he had to accept assistance at the table, or in sitting down and getting up. It is in these little things that I am able to show him the real pity with which he inspires me.

After dinner he is accustomed to sit a few minutes on one of the garden-benches, which are placed under the windows of the ground-floor. The other evening, Cécile and I, seeing him ill at ease on the bench, signalled to each other; Cécile went to the drawing-room for some cushions, which she passed through the window to me; M. d'Éblis, to whom I delivered them one by one, attempted to arrange them as a support for the wounded arm and leg. But he did it very awkwardly, and so, laughingly scolding him for his clumsiness, I said to M. de Louvercy, "Permit me, monsieur," and adjusted the cushions with a woman's superior tact. As M. de Louvercy thanked me a trifle constrainedly, M. d'Éblis said to him, gaily, "What a good hospital nurse, is she not, Roger?"

M. d'Éblis seems to me more grateful for these little attentions than he who is the direct object of them. He looks at me at such times in a searching, thoughtful, and, I believe, almost tender way. However, the feeling which he may entertain for me betrays itself only by these slight impulses of gratitude, and by the kind of pleasure that he seems to find in my company and my conversation.

Is this enough to make it wise for me to open my heart, to cherish therein a preference which doubtless is still but a passing dream, but which, if I abandon myself to it, will become to-morrow, perhaps, a profound passion?

*July 5th.*

This morning, after an almost sleepless night, I rose soon after daybreak, that is to say, at seven o'clock, and I resolved to do an extraordinary thing. I put my loved locked diary

under my arm, and taking my umbrella in one hand and my bamboo case, which contains all the necessary materials for writing, in the other, I softly left the north tower by the south door. Opposite this door is a broad avenue; in this avenue there is on the left hand a winding path; at the end of this path there is a thicket, and in this thicket a statue of Flora, or Ceres, or Pomona, with a rustic table and three chairs. It is a charming spot, especially on a lovely summer morning like this. A kind of religious twilight always reigns here; the leaves fall together and interlace in a sort of lattice-work, through which one gets but few glimpses of the blue sky. The sun sheds here and there on the ground, on the chairs, on the shoulders of the goddess, some luminous rays which look as though sifted through the stained glass window of a church. As the dew evaporates, the white acacia flowers emit a faint odour of orange blossom; and, to complete the picture, one hears from an unseen ravine the musical murmur of a little brook, which fills the pond, the hum of the swans, and which passes by here, one knows not how.

One knows no more either why the thought occurred to Charlotte d'Erra to choose this charming spot in which to write the recital of yesterday evening. Perhaps she wished to frame richly, in gold and flowers, a simple episode in the life of a young girl, which may become—if God in His goodness should permit—the first page in the life of a woman.

Yesterday, after dinner, we were distributed, according to our daily custom, about the court-yard of the château, to breathe the fresh evening air, mingled with the perfume of roses and of cigars. M. de Louvercy smoked, and stretched himself on his favourite bench which we had covered with cushions. Céile, always as restless as a star, was suddenly seized with the unlucky notion of playing with her cousin's crutch. She examined it at first timidly, then she became better acquainted with it, and used it to serve her apprentice-

ship as a sportswoman, her father having sent her a few days before a little gun with which she proposed to destroy all the rabbits and squirrels in the park. Meanwhile she exercised herself with the crutch in "shoulder arms," "carry arms," and then took aim at imaginary rabbits represented by MM. Henri and René de Valnesse. I saw M. Roger frown painfully, and the Commandant d'Éblis bite his moustache; I gave Cécile a severe look, but to no purpose. Encouraged by the expansive appreciation of her two admirers, she cruelly aggravated her thoughtlessness by placing the crutch under her arm, and trying to walk with one foot in the air, like her poor disabled cousin. She took a few steps in the court in this way with great gravity, and without a shadow of malice, simply to see, she said, if it were very inconvenient. M. Roger pretended to smile, but his brow was dark with anger. I perceived it, and would have gone to Cécile to warn her, but M. d'Éblis anticipated me. He stepped up to her quickly, and whispered to her with energy a few words which I did not hear. But I plainly heard Cécile reply to him, "Always lessens!" "This one is well merited, I think," said M. d'Éblis. She seemed moved, and hesitated a moment between her demon and her angel. Then she took a few precipitate steps towards the house, and gently placed the crutch against the bench; and, detaching from the trellis which surrounded the window a sprig of jasmine, she tried to place it in M. de Louvercy's button-hole, saying to him, "I will decorate you, cousin!"

M. Roger snatched the flower from her hands and threw it on the gravel. "You are an idiot!" said he. He rose at the same time, and, bowing slightly to me, went to his room.

As soon as he had disappeared, Cécile clasped her hands and raised her shoulders. "There are moments when I could kill myself!" she cried, at the same time she let herself sink upon the bench and hid her head in her hands, and we heard

her sob. M. d'Éblis exchanged a look of intelligence and a smile with me; then, turning toward Céile, "Come, mademoiselle," said he, "your despair is excessive! For so small an offence, a mere childish indiscretion.—Come now," he continued, picking up the sprig of jasmine, "would you like me to take your flower to him?" Still weeping, she made a sign that she would like it very much; then she raised her head a little, and, smiling at M. d'Éblis through her tears, "Always a father to me!" she exclaimed.

We moved a little way off to allow her to recover herself. All of Madame de Louverey's guests were walking here and there in groups, talking in low tones as if penetrated by the beauty of the evening. It was serene and superb. A full moon filled the vast court-yard with its limpid light; there was a silver sheen upon the water of the pond, in the midst of which two large swans slept immovable in their snowy whiteness. Exchanging a few indifferent words the while, M. d'Éblis and I walked to and fro between the pond and the first trees of the avenue, whose arched nave, in the midst of all this brightness, remained sombre as a cathedral at midnight. After a silence, I said, "A scene so sweet and peaceful must form a singular contrast to your memories of the war, does it not, commandant?"

He started. "Have you the gift of second-sight, mademoiselle?"

"I have scarcely the gift of first sight," said I, laughingly, "for I am very near-sighted. But why do you ask, monsieur?"

"Because at that very moment my thoughts did carry me back to a scene in my military life, to an evening like this, but less pleasant although as peaceful."

"May I hear about it?"

He hesitated, sighed, then bowing slightly answered, "Certainly. I was outside Metz. On the evening of which

I speak, the 27th of October, I had been detailed to carry some orders the meaning of which appeared only too clear to me. I was, in particular, to arrest the march of one of our regiments, whose number I have forgotten. Having found the regiment, I fulfilled my mission, and was ready to return, waiting only to rest my horse a little. We were then in a plain near a village called Colombey, I think ; the terrible tempests which marked those evil days were allayed for a few hours ; a tranquil moon was reflected in the small pools with which the country was covered. The imagination creates strange associations. There is certainly little in the smiling loveliness which surrounds us here to remind one of those desolate marshes ; however, the moonlight on the water recalled them to me just now, and those beautiful swans which are sleeping there remind me of my escort of dragoons, immovable as they in their white mantles. The men of the regiment, while waiting new orders, kept ranks, and rested on their arms. A large bivouac-fire had been lighted, around which a few officers conversed mournfully in low tones. The rumour of a capitulation had circulated through the camp since the evening before. The colonel, who was a middle-aged man, with a grizzled moustache, paced to and fro by himself some distance off, crushing in his hand the order that I had brought him. Suddenly he approached me, and, seizing my arm, 'Captain,' said he, in the tone of a man about to mortally provoke another, 'two words, I pray you. You come from head-quarters, you must know more of what's going on than I. This is the end, is it not ?'

" 'They say so, colonel, and I believe it.'

" 'You believe it ! How can you believe such a thing ?'

" He loosened my arm with a sort of violence, took a few steps, and, turning abruptly to me again, he fixed his eyes upon mine. 'Prisoners, then?' he asked.

" 'I fear so, colonel.'

"Again he was silent. He remained some time before me in an attitude of profound reflection, then, raising his head, he resumed, with unusual emotion in his voice: 'And the colours?'

" 'I do not know, colonel.'

" 'Ah! you do not know?'

"He left me again, and recommenced his solitary walk for five or six minutes; then, advancing to the front of the men, he said, in a tone of command, 'The flag!'

"The standard-bearer stepped out of the ranks. The colonel seized the staff with one hand, and, raising the other towards the group of drummers, 'Beat to orders!' he said.

"The drums beat. The colonel approached the fire, carrying the flag raised high above him. He planted the staff on the ground, threw an earnest look around the circle of officers, and uncovered his head. They all followed his example; the waiting soldiers kept a death-like silence. He then hesitated a moment; I saw his lips tremble, his eyes fixed themselves with an expression of anguish on the glorious fragment of torn silk—sad symbol of his country! At last he was decided. He bent his knee, and softly laid the eagle in the burning fire. A more vivid flame suddenly shot up, showing the pale countenances of the officers the more clearly. Some of them wept.

" 'Break ranks!' said the colonel, and a second time the mournful roll of the drums resounded.

"He resumed his cap, and came towards me. 'Captain,' he said, in a firm voice, 'when you return, have no scruple—none—in relating what you have seen. I salute you.'

" 'Colonel,' said I, 'will you permit me to embrace you?'

"He drew me violently to his breast, and, holding me so tightly as almost to suffocate me, 'Ah! my poor child!' he murmured—'my poor child!'

At this point in his recital, M. d'Éblis turned away, and I



heard a sort of sob. I could not help reaching out my hand to him. He seemed astonished ; he took it and pressed it warmly. "You comprehend, then, all one suffers in such moments?"

"Yes;" and, as I sought to withdraw my hand, he gently retained it. "If anything in the world," added he, "could make me forget, it would be a moment like this." I did not answer, and he released my hand. After a few steps in silence, "Shall we return?" said I.

"Yes, anything you wish." And we returned.

Nothing more. But, on the part of a man so reserved and so loyal, was it not a great deal—was it not everything? These words, when I recall them to myself, when I re-read them, seem to me almost without significance; but his deep, tender, penetrating tone—was it not that of a heart which offers itself sacredly and devotedly?

Truly I believe so; and, if I may judge by myself, such a moment—a moment when two souls touch each other in so close a union—suffices to join them for ever on earth and in heaven. My God, I pray thee, grant that I may not deceive myself!

*July 13th.*

For some days I have not had the courage to resume my pen. I do not understand what is going on; I do not understand what evil genius has touched the château with his wand, and suddenly saddened all the spirits, soured all the natures, and changed all the hearts therein, excepting mine, alas!

The first symptoms of this revolution were manifested the very evening that left upon me so happy—and, I very much fear, so deceptive—an impression. When I rejoined Cécile under the windows of the drawing-room after separating from M. d'Éblis, I thought that she was sulky, and I inquired the

reason. As usual she had to be urged to tell me ; but, as I insisted, she drew me beneath the lilacs, and declared to me, in a serious tone and (from her lips) one of extreme bitterness, that I was a false friend, that I completely neglected all her interests, that I abused her confidence, and that I amused myself in some way or other, while she remained in suspense between her two lovers, in a horribly painful and even ludicrous position. I bowed my head to this storm, acknowledging to myself that I had somewhat merited these reproaches, and that for some time I had been more effectually engrossed by my own interests than by hers. I calmed her as best I could, alleging the usual difficulty of making a choice, and promising to have a decisive conversation with her very soon, when I would try to end our mutual irresolution.

It seems that, at the same time, a much more serious quarrel had broken out between the Commandant d'Éblis and M. de Louvercy. Over what? no one could tell me. I only learned from Madame de Chagres that M. de Louvercy, who at first sought his apartments after the little scene with Cécile, had suddenly returned to the court-yard ; that he had accosted M. d'Éblis the moment I left him, and had led him down the gloomy avenue. There they were heard talking with great animation ; Madame de Chagres told me that the voice of M. de Louvercy especially evinced a kind of rage or of grief that approached to frenzy. They were afterwards seen to cross the court-yard in silence, M. d'Éblis sustaining M. de Louvercy, who seemed to walk with even more than his usual difficulty. A few minutes after, Madame de Louvercy was sent for in haste, as her son was suffering from a nervous attack. After this occurrence he did not appear among us for two or three days.

M. d'Éblis on his side neglected us a great deal during the same interval : he either remained shut up all day with his

friend, or he rambled over the fields in his company, and we met him only at meals. He was unusually sad and silent; his attitude towards me was embarrassed, his language of a coldness quite new and apparently assumed. If it were possible for me to imagine that there had been any question of me in his quarrel with M. Roger, and that the latter had slandered me to M. d'Éblis, truly I would believe it. But the supposition is evidently inadmissible. Whatever may have been the subject of their disagreement, no trace of it remains between them. Their friendly union seems even closer than before; one would say that it had been strengthened by some new tie. A shadow of this is especially plain in M. Roger's manner: in his relations with M. d'Éblis he displays a curiously affectionate tenderness, as if he would be pardoned for something. It is clear that the wrong was on his side. But what wrong?

Madame de Louvercy knows apparently, for she is more pensive than usual. From contagion, doubtless, my grandmother appears preoccupied, and MM. de Valnesse themselves, as well as their sisters, mope in their corners.

For myself, I will not grow dismal over what I feel. I soared in the heavens among the stars; my wings were suddenly clipped, and I fell heavily to the earth. That is all. I force myself to forget this radiant illusion of a moment; but I cannot, and I fear that I shall never be able to.

*July 22d.*

Did I not despair too hastily? It seems to me that after that sudden squall everything has returned little by little to the accustomed order. M. d'Éblis had certainly experienced some very disagreeable annoyance, which at first overruled every other feeling in him, and the dominance of which he had shaken off with difficulty. But at last, little by little, he has chased away this cloud, and is now quite himself

again. At the same time, he has resumed his habits of friendly and confidential conversation with me, although I always find in him, when he is near me, something sad and constrained. I do not know exactly what. Nevertheless, he has under his grave exterior a depth of gaiety which Cécile especially has the gift of arousing. Her fantastic and charming character, so honest and frolicsome, interests and diverts him; he censures and yet delights in her caprices, and the arch tricks, at once graceful and grotesque, which she is so fond of.

Yesterday morning, for example, she had resolved to try her skill with her gun in the wood which surrounds the park. We all accompanied her, and M. d'Éblis, in his military capacity, was requested to preside over this dangerous expedition. The rabbits ran about in the woods like mice in a granary. It is scarcely necessary to say that Cécile did not kill a single one; but, by way of compensation, she almost crippled MM. de Valnesse, who hastened to climb the trees whenever she took a shot.

As we were returning gaily from this fruitless campaign, following a hollow which skirts the wood, Cécile perceived in the very middle of the pathway and in front of a gate leading into a field one of those brown stone-ware pitchers which are used in milking. "Stop!" said she; "see that pitcher down there all by itself." Piqued at her non-success with the rabbits, she at once conceived the triumphant idea of revenging herself on this unhappy pitcher; she quickly raised her gun to her shoulder and fired. "Hit!" she cried. The pitcher was shattered in pieces, and a stream of milk flowed over the ground. At the same moment the milkmaid, whom we had not seen before, as she was occupied in fastening the gate, suddenly appeared before us. She was a little peasant about twelve years old, and her pale blonde hair was covered with a large linen cap. When she

perceived the disaster that had befallen her pitcher, the poor little girl raised and dropped her arms with a movement of profound consternation ; then, after a pause of dumb stupor, she burst into tears, and sobbed out that her mother would beat her.

"No ! no ! be comforted," cried Cécile, "I will pay you for your milk." While speaking, she had advanced quickly, and, noticing that the bottom of the broken pitcher still contained quite a quantity of milk, "How fortunate that is !" said she ; "I am as thirsty as a wolf." She bent down, carefully raised the fragment of the pitcher to her lips, and drank the milk eagerly ; then she stopped a moment to take breath, and seeing the look of admiration with which we regarded her—for she was perfectly charming with the broken pitcher in her hand—showing all her dimples—"A Greuze !" said she. After which she resumed drinking. When her thirst was appeased, there was still some milk left. "Who will drink ?" she asked. The dark M. de Valnesse eagerly seized the remnant of the pitcher, and moistened his lips in the milk.

"It is twenty francs !" said Cécile.

The young man smilingly took out his purse, and paid her. The fair M. de Valnesse drank in his turn.

"Twenty francs !" repeated Cécile.—"It is your turn now, commandant !" she then said to M. d'Éblis, who seemed greatly astonished.

"Mademoiselle," he replied—"I do not like milk, but here are my twenty francs."

Cécile placed the three coins in the hand of the little blonde milkmaid. "There," said she, "do not cry any more, my child !" and she kissed her heartily on both cheeks.

We continued our walk. Cécile was a little gloomy ; at the end of a few steps—"Monsieur," said she to the Commandant d'Éblis, "why would you not drink after me ?"

"But, mademoiselle, I had the honour of telling you : because I do not like milk."

"Don't fib—it was another lesson ! When we get up to ten, we will make a cross, will we not ? However, I don't bear you any grudge. No, seriously, I feel that I gain a great deal in your company, commandant. A little more of this discipline, and I shall be perfection."

There was more truth than she thought, doubtless, in that pleasantry. She has a great respect for M. d'Éblis, and is more careful when in his company. She watches him, in spite of herself, to see how he takes her pranks, and often checks herself in the midst of a frolic, if she notices the slightest sign of disapproval on his face. She chafes a little at the curb, but she recognises her master and obeys him. In short, she submits in a very great degree, as we all do for that matter, to the authority of this firm and tender character, this lofty and somewhat disdainful spirit. The companionship of M. d'Éblis, if she could enjoy it constantly, would be very salutary to her. Only he and I have such a command over her. Ah ! if ever—if ever the dream with which I flatter myself should be realised—the dear girl always surrounded by the friendship and the influence of us both, would truly become, as she says, "perfection"—and a most pleasing perfection.

*July 26th.*

I am still much moved and agitated by a conversation that I have just had with Cécile. Feeling the reproaches that she addressed to me the other day, I had heartily resumed the course of my observations and studies of the merits of MM. de Valnesse. After due reflection, my choice was fixed upon M. René, who seemed to me to have a less superficial nature and a more cultivated mind than his cousin Henri. Immediately after breakfast I said significantly to Cécile that I would like to speak with her. "Very well !"

said she, dryly, "what about?" "Really! why, of what interests you so much." "Nothing 'interests me so much!' However, let us hear."

A little surprised by this beginning, I led her under the fir-trees of the park. "Well, my dear," I said to her, "my choice is made."

"Ah! You have taken a great deal of time about it!"

"The choice will be all the wiser," I returned, laughingly. Then I explained to her my long hesitation, and finally enumerated all the reasons which seemed to me to incline the balance in favour of M. René.

She listened to what I said with a strange air, her lips pressed together, her eyes roving about, and here and there she struck the trunks of the trees with the end of her parasol. When I had finished, "The misfortune is," said she, "I prefer the other."

"What other?"

"Whom but M. Henri, naturally?"

"The misfortune is not very great, my darling, for, as I have told you, I see hardly any tangible difference between these two gentlemen; and, with this equality of merit, it is very clear that your own personal taste should decide."

"So you," resumed Cécile, "would marry M. René?"

"I am not in question!"

"But, in short, would you marry him if you were free to?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I do not love him."

"That is to say, he would not be worthy of you; but he is good enough for me!"

"My dear," replied I, tranquilly, "if you choose, we will resume our conversation at some future time when you are in a better humour."

"No, but truly," said she, flourishing her parasol about,

"it is really incredible, insulting, this furor among you all to be rid of me ; my father, my aunt, and now you ! However, I am not your slave. Girls cannot be married by force ; and I say to you distinctly, my dear, as I will say to my father and my aunt—I do not wish to marry !"

"As for that," said I, "nothing is easier, my dear child."

"I would prefer a thousand times to re-enter the convent !"

"Pardon me, my dear, it is not a convent that you should enter, but a lunatic asylum. Meanwhile, I will return to my room."

I walked away, for my patience, which I may say is very great, was at an end. She held me back, crying, "Charlotte, do not leave me ; I am unhappy !" and, in her affectionate way, she threw herself weeping into my arms.

I was profoundly troubled, for her words, "I am unhappy !" had roused a startling suspicion in my mind. But at last I murmured, through the caresses that I lavished on her, "What has happened ? What is the matter ?"

She answered me, shaking her head and stammering out the words brokenly, "Nothing—nothing—I do not know—truly I do not know."

When I saw that she had recovered herself a little, I pressed her anew with questions ; she looked at me fixedly a moment, as if she were on the point of confiding some secret to me ; then she sighed and was silent.

At last she was able to give me some such explanation of her emotion as this : As long as she saw her marriage in the distant horizon, she regarded it, she told me, with the indifference of a child ; but, in proportion as it appeared in a nearer and more real perspective, she understood its serious character better, and she recoiled from the choice which must carry with it the happiness or unhappiness of her whole life. She concluded by begging me to leave her a few days more for reflection.



I simply observed to her that she was submitting these gentlemen to a rather lengthy novitiate, and that, if she remained much longer without manifesting a preference for one or the other, she might see them both depart some fine morning discouraged.

"Ah, well, good riddance to them!" said Cécile.

We returned to the house, and I went immediately to my room; I longed to be alone, to try and put a little order and quietude into my ideas. I have not succeeded; my head and my heart are alike bewildered. It is not possible for me to mistake Cécile's feelings; there are not two ways of interpreting her quite recent indifference to the regard of the MM. de Valncsse, her words, her silence, her tears. She loves, or she believes she loves, M. d'Éblis. That is her secret! Great God, is it possible? Of all the griefs that I could suffer, of all the afflictions that my imagination could conceive, assuredly this would be one of the most bitter. A rivalry of the heart, a contest of jealousy between Cécile and myself! A contest in which I must sacrifice either my dearest friendship or my dearest love! What a trial!—and I cannot even pray to God to spare me: it has come; it exists.

I have done my best; I have tried my utmost to elevate my thoughts. I cannot willingly share his love—I cannot! All that I can do—and I will do it—is to bring to this sad contest an integrity, a loyalty alike irreproachable; never to say a word prejudicial to Cécile, nor one word that shall advance my own interests; to wait finally, with a torn heart but peaceful conscience, till he chooses between us two. If he should choose me at last, Cécile would without doubt suffer cruelly, poor girl! However, I believe—I know so well her lively, tender, but fickle nature—she would find consolation, whilst I—never!

From the beginning, his inclination carried him towards me rather than towards her. A woman does not deceive

herself in these things. Besides, my grandmother noticed it; and, finally, although I am far from boasting of it, there is, it seems to me, between us, between our characters, more sympathy and harmony. Since that happy evening when we came to understand each other so well, I have found him, it is true, colder, and more reserved with me; but there has been something on his mind. He appears also a little more engrossed with, or rather more curious about, Cécile; but she amuses him, I believe, more than she pleases him. However, who knows? Ah! my poor darling, what an injury you have done me!

They are calling me for the afternoon excursion. M. d'Éblis will accompany us. Now that my eyes are opened, the least circumstance, the smallest detail, may be a decisive revelation.

*Same day, Evening.*

In the course of this excursion, Cécile met with a singular adventure. We took the carriages about two o'clock to pay a visit to the curé of Louvercy, who had arranged a fishing-party for us. His parsonage, which adjoins the church, is only a few miles from the château, and is situated on the bank of a little river, a tributary, I think, of the Euro. Half the party repaired to the parsonage garden, which juts out into the river so as to seem almost like an island, and betook themselves to fishing. M. d'Éblis, Madame de Chagres, her husband, and myself, remained in the churchyard, which is one of the prettiest village churchyards anywhere to be seen. The church itself, lost in the trees, is a graceful fifteenth-century monument, the porch and pointed-arched windows of which are covered with pretty fretwork. M. d'Éblis set himself to draw it. We had brought seats and formed a group about him, watching his work, and admiring by turns the play of the light on the water and amid the

foliage; for the day was glorious. At the end of the road which skirts the churchyard, there is an old wooden bridge thrown across the river, and opposite on the other side of the water a rocky hill crowned with green turf. We surveyed it all, seated in the shade of a venerable yew which, through the heat of the day, emitted a resinous odour.

Soon we saw Cécile appear; she had quickly got tired of fishing—and perhaps also of the absence of M. d'Éblis. She came to flutter and hover around him like a butterfly; then she began to stroll through the churchyard and read the epitaphs in an undertone. But there was one thing that especially attracted her attention, and before long absorbed her completely. Some one in the village had died; and in the middle of the churchyard a grave had been dug, doubtless to be filled to-morrow morning. This open grave awakened Cécile's interest in an extraordinary degree. After approaching it several times with mingled dread and curiosity, she grew bolder little by little, and tried to look to the bottom of it. But that was difficult, for on all sides of the grave masses of earth and gravel which had been dug out of it were piled up and gave way underfoot. Finally, an idea occurred to her: to enable her to lean over without risk, she seized firmly with one hand the top of a little cypress, which grew on a hillock near by, and leaning with the other on her parasol, we saw her bend her fragile form over the grave and look eagerly into its depths. M. d'Éblis raised his head; he took in at a glance this strange scene, lighted up by the summer's sun, this charming figure leaning over this sinister hole, this young and fresh face, half smiling, half terrified. He hastily turned over the leaf of his sketch-book, to fix this reminiscence in it at once. Then, suddenly springing to his feet, he cried: "Take care, mademoiselle! for heaven's sake, take care!"

We all rose with the same impulse. The cypress by which Cécile supported herself with one hand had been half under-

mined that morning by the grave-digger's work, and it yielded with her weight at the same instant that the rubbish gave way under her feet. She lost her balance, threw up her arms, uttered a scream, and disappeared in the yawning grave !

We hurried to her with feelings which it is difficult for me to describe. I felt, myself, as if a stroke of lightning had shot through me from head to foot. We reached her very quickly. The poor girl had got up, and was standing at the bottom of the grave, her hair all in disorder ; she was quite immovable, utterly bewildered, and looked up at us with an idiotic smile. The Valnesses, like ourselves, had hastened to her at the scream she had uttered. Amid great confusion, everybody proffered his advice for getting her out of this horrible tomb. They stretched out their hands to her, but in vain. Every one knows how deep these graves are. Some of the gentlemen said it would be necessary to go for ropes, others suggested chairs and a ladder ; meanwhile Cécile appeared to be in a state of hysterical exaltation, which might easily become dangerous if prolonged.

The calm and commanding voice of M. d'Éblis silenced every one. He waved us back with a gesture. "Come, mademoiselle," he said, laughing, "do not let us lose our heads. There is nothing at all serious in this accident. A little coolness and you will be out of this in a minute. Gymnastics are my strong point, as you shall see. Now attention ! Let me pass my hands under your arms." He half knelt on the rubbish and lifted Cécile by the shoulders, smiling at her and encouraging her with a look ; and then, raising himself gradually, he drew her to the top of the grave. But at that moment she fainted ; her eyes closed, and she lay motionless in his arms, pale as a corpse, her lips half open. "She mustn't find herself here when she comes to again," said M. d'Éblis to us. "I am going to carry her to that apple-orchard down there ; it is more cheerful."

Accordingly, he went out of the churchyard, bearing the swooning Cécile on his breast. We opened the gate of the apple-orchard on the other side of the road for him. As he bent over to lay her gently on the grass, she opened her eyes and looked at him for a second or two in a dazed way; then recollecting herself and smiling at him, she murmured, "A father to me." Again she closed her eyes, and fainted anew. Water was brought; I bathed her temples and loosened her corsage slightly, and she soon came to her senses. A quarter of an hour afterwards we set out to return to the château. On the way we tried with affectionate pleasantry to make light of the adventure, and laughed over it heartily, but without succeeding in totally dissipating the superstitious impression that it had left upon Cécile's mind; for although she did her best to laugh with us, she remained very pale and pensive.

Nevertheless, it is possible that she will owe her happiness to this doleful incident. I was walking by the side of M. d'Éblis when he was carrying her in his arms, and I could see the expression of his face bent over her pretty, sleeping head. It was not alone sympathy and compassion; it was the tenderest admiration. Undoubtedly, in the very weakness of this delicate being, always in need of protection, there is a powerful attraction for a strong man.

Ah! Cécile, Providence is on thy side!

July 30th.

Nothing very new. Cécile has submitted more and more to the power and the spell of M. d'Éblis; that is evident, and every one is beginning to notice it. As for him, I do not know what to think. He is an enigma. In his manner with Cécile, there is certainly an aroused and amused curiosity, considerable pleasure, a lively interest, some affection even, but no passion, as it seems to me: nothing as ardent—if I

dare say so—as one of those looks which I found fixed on me so often formerly, and which even now I still surprise I think occasionally. Even his voice when speaking to me is strangely troubled, but it never is with Cécile. What can be passing in his heart?

I went to walk in the park this morning, questioning myself the while; and, in questioning myself, I confess I cried a little, and I do not weep very easily, either. But this constant and sustained agitation to which I am a prey, this silent rivalry with my best friend, these internal struggles between my conscience and my duty, between my unhappy passion and my disturbed friendship, all this martyrdom—for that is just what it is—has shaken my nerves frightfully. At the turning of the lonely path where I was walking, I suddenly saw Madame de Louvercy appear. She had her handkerchief in her hand, and seemed to me to be using it as I had been using mine. She, too, had just been weeping. She could not recover herself as quickly as I. “You surprise me,” she said, “in one of my moments of deep discouragement.”

“Is M. Roger suffering again, madame?” I asked.

“Not physically, but his moral condition makes me despair. I believed for several days, ever since he consented to seek a little distraction in our society, that there was something to be hoped for there; but it was an illusion. I imagine that this very return to the world has, on the contrary, caused him to feel still more keenly the severity of his misfortunes, exasperated his grief and his humiliation. You cannot know—but I am a daily witness of it all—the paroxysms of rebellious rage, the furiousness of a fallen angel, which shock me as a mother and, alas! as a Christian. Ah, my dear child,” added she, taking me by the hands, “in such adversity we have only God! And Roger does not believe in Him, or, what is perhaps worse, he blames Him.

He shuns a church like a leper. If he could only pray once, I feel that he would be comforted, if not consoled. But he will not; and though he loves me much, yet since his misfortune I have never been able to get him to pray. I have begged him on my knees, and he will not." And the poor woman burst into a flood of weeping. We stood there, looking sadly at each other, finding some sort of solace in drawing together our sad hearts.

*August 1st.*

This day will count in my life. As there has been less animation at the château for some time past, no excursion was arranged for to-day, and everybody remained at home, either in their own apartment or in the drawing-room. After scribbling the foregoing lines, I thought of returning to that melancholy walk where I had met Madame de Louvercy, and resuming the reverie she had interrupted. I was on my way thither when I heard a sound of rapid footsteps behind me; I turned round and saw M. d'Éblis. "Pardon me, mademoiselle," he said, with his gravest air, "will you honour me with a few moments' conversation?"

At these words, my heart stopped short; and, when it began to beat again, the shock was so violent that my very being seemed on the point of dissolution. I realised that the moment which was to decide my fate had come. "Monsieur," I replied, dissembling my emotion as best I could, though very badly, I fear, "I am listening."

He was very much agitated himself; he walked a few steps at my side in silence. Then he resumed: "Mademoiselle, I shall seem very indiscreet to you, but my indiscretion will at least prove the profound and respectful confidence with which you have inspired me, since I shall trust to you for the happiness or the misery of my existence. More than any one else in the world, mademoiselle, you are

in a position to know Mademoiselle Cécile de Stèle thoroughly. You were friends in childhood. You were companions at the convent, were you not?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You have had an opportunity of intimately studying and estimating her character, her mind. Before offering her my hand, before consecrating my life to her, may I ask you what you think of her?"

"Everything that is good."

"You feel, do you not, mademoiselle, that there is nothing conventional in my questions? I conjure you, let your reply be equally sincere. Mademoiselle de Stèle is a very attractive young girl—any one can see that—graceful and full of distinction; brilliant and witty—I know all that. But her character is a little whimsical: it surprises me; it even startles me slightly, I must confess. In a word, I ask you, you who have been able to penetrate all its mysteries, what is there to hope for in it, and what to dread?"

"Cécile, monsieur, has never known a mother. She has been brought up by her father, whose only child she is, and who has spoiled her at once a little and a great deal. This is the explanation of the inequalities of temperament, the contradictions, the caprices that seem to have struck you. But her nature is admirable. She is the tenderest, the most constant, the most devoted of friends; she will be the most tender, constant, and devoted of wives—on one condition though, which is that she is well guided and loves her guide."

"I ask a thousand pardons," he rejoined, "but do you believe that she can love a man whose character is as different from her own as mine is, for example; a man whose serious and almost severe bearing contrasts so strongly with her sprightliness—at least apparently? You do not reply."



"Because I am seeking my words, not my thought; for my opinion does not waver. I believe, then, monsieur, that if there is any one especially fitted to win Cécile, to reform her little failures, to develop still further her noble qualities, to make her an honourable, faithful, and happy wife it is yourself."

He bowed low. Then after a pause, "More than all, you are very fond of her, are you not?" he asked.

"Very."

"That itself is a high encomium. Thank you, mademoiselle; I receive her with absolute confidence from your hand."

We had been drawing near the château; he took the path thither after having again thanked me, and saluted me with a gesture and a glance. When he had disappeared from my sight, I sat down on one of the benches by the path. After having supported myself throughout this interview by an effort of courage and pride, I felt the ground sinking beneath me.

It was all over: from that instant, my life was desolate; my heart, though only twenty years old, had received a wound that will never heal. But how understand such conduct in a man of honour—a man of delicate feeling, moreover? By what secret inspiration, by what refinement of cruelty, could he have been actuated? I cannot conceive. Had he any consciousness of the horrible torture he was inflicting upon me? I know not. All I know is, that it happened as I have said.

At his first words, at the first blow, I fixed my mind on only one thing—to save my womanly dignity in his eyes, and to conquer any impulse of base jealousy which might urge me to slander Cécile. Perhaps this preoccupation was excessive, and I was thus drawn into a eulogy contrary to my belief and to the truth. But error in this direction is better

than error in the other. Meanwhile I had not reached the end of the trials the day had in store for me.

When I was able to stand on my feet, I commenced walking again, to try and calm my agitation. I walked on straight before me without knowing whither, and, as I was crossing one of the principal avenues of the park, a noise of wheels caused me to look round. It was M. Roger de Louveroy, in his dog cart. He was alone, for, in spite of his mother's urgent request, he generally refuses to take a servant with him, following his habit of declining all assistance save when it is an absolute necessity.

He was driving rapidly, after his usual fashion. Seeing me, he reined in his spirited horse with difficulty, checking it almost in the air within two paces of where I stood. "Will you not take a drive, mademoiselle?" he asked, with his always ironical and slightly bitter smile.

"No, thank you."

"Is it my horse or myself that frightens you?"

"Neither."

"Well, in that case give me the pleasure of your company."

"It seems to me," I said, "that it would hardly be proper."

"Oh, proper!" replied he, shaking his head. "Alas! with me everything is proper. Besides, we will not go out of our own woods. Come!—you will not? Undoubtedly I horrify you!"

I saw the habitual pallor and melancholy of his face deepen. I was seized with a lively sentiment of pity; and then at the time any kind of diversion was a welcome relief. My head was half crazed, and everything was the same to me.

"If it is only for a drive in the park," I said, "I shall be very glad to go." Then I got up into the dog cart, not

without making the attempt twice, for the horse, a jet-black thorough-bred, was very restive, and M. de Louvercy had great difficulty in holding it in with his one hand. We set off at once at a very rapid pace. Very soon, M. de Louvercy said, smiling, "You have missed your vocation, mademoiselle."

"How so?"

"You were born to be a Sister of Charity. There was one in the Orleans Hospital, while I was there, who resembled you a little. That struck me the first time I saw you. But she was less beautiful. Are you of creole origin?"

"No, I am a Parisian. And this Sister took good care of you?"

"Too good," he replied with a sigh.

"Why too good?"

"What good was it to preserve a life which must be only a burden to myself and every one else?"

"Will you let me tell you, monsieur, that you seem to me a little unjust towards Providence? Providence has cruelly afflicted you, beyond doubt, but are you not too insensible to the consolations which it has left you, and which so many unfortunates are without?"

"Pray, what consolations, mademoiselle?"

"Why, your mother, first of all, and her incomparable tenderness; then too the solicitude of so rare and devoted a friendship; finally, study—the leisure you have to devote to it, the delight that it gives you, the recognition and esteem that it promises—"

"Yes," he rejoined, bitterly; "all that may prevent one from going mad. But that is all it can do. And yet there are moments when I think I am mad, or when I am so in reality."

He was silent for a few seconds, shaking the reins abstractedly and worrying the mouth of his horse, which over-

tainly did not need to be excited. He did not perceive at first that the animal fretted, and was getting the better of his hand, and he resumed, "You saw D'Éblis this morning?"

"Yes: I had just parted from him when you ran across me."

"Ah! A noble fellow, is he not?"

"Yes," I replied, with a simple nod. He looked steadily at me.

"You are very pale, mademoiselle. I had already noticed it. Are you unwell?"

"No."

There was a wicked smile on his lips, and, as if done purposely, he again shook the reins on the back of his horse, which became half frenzied. We fairly flew. The horse, in his furious and reckless course, just missed dashing us against the bars of the avenue gateway, turned violently to the right, and tore along at a frightful rate on a public road leading, as I knew only too well, to a laundry on the river-bank, which is very steep at that part.

M. de Louvercy endeavoured to quiet his horse with hand and voice, but he did not succeed; we still sped on like the wind; the trees waltzed by like visions: a kind of vertigo seized me. We drew near the end of the road, and already saw the sun's reflection in the water. M. de Louvercy turned to me. "Mademoiselle Charlotte," he said, coldly, with that insane look that he has in his bad moments, "do you value life greatly?"

Truly not, I did not value it highly. A simple movement of my eyebrows told him as much.

"All the same," he replied; "it would be a pity!"

I don't know if he had a secret wherewith to tame his horse, which he had not chosen to employ before; but almost immediately, obedient to a word or two, accompanied by a slight movement of the hand, the animal became quiet;

he resumed a reasonable gait, and before reaching the river we were able to turn aside into the fork of another road. M. de Louvercy, whose coolness I had admired in spite of everything—for we had certainly run the risk of our necks—then said to me, quietly: “It is easy enough to understand why I do not care for life: but you! It is a mystery!”

“It is a mystery,” I repeated, smiling.

“A disappointment in love?” he retorted, in a tone of sombre irony; and after a pause, “So lovely—yet disdained—that would be strange!”

“Monsieur,” I said, very sharply, “your misfortune gives you great privileges, but it does not, I presume, allow you the liberty of insulting a woman.”

“Have I not told you that I am insane?”

“I see you are, monsieur; but I should have been warned of it.”

He was silent for a long time. He bit his lips to such extent that I saw a drop of blood spurt from them. Finally, he resumed in a greatly moved voice: “Mademoiselle, I am unworthy of the honour you have done me. I feel it, and I humbly beg you to forgive me.”

“Very well, monsieur. Suppose we return?” We were then rather far out in the country, for I could see the little church of Louvercy through the trees.

“We will return,” he said sadly; “but really, shall we return angry with each other—enemies? Come, mademoiselle, is there anything in this world that a poor wretch like myself can do to show you his profound respect and to efface the memory of a hateful word?”

A sudden idea occurred to me. I remembered what Madame de Louvercy had told me in the morning of the grief which the rebellious impiety of her son caused her. I saw the little church close by us, and said hastily: “Yes,

you can do something which will win back my esteem and even deserve my friendship. Down there is the church; come and pray with me there."

His brows suddenly contracted; nevertheless he asked in a gentle voice: "My mother has been speaking to you?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish it?"

"Yes."

"Let us go."

A few minutes after, we reached the garden of the parsonage which adjoins the church. The curé's servant at work in the garden raised his head at the noise of the vehicle; M. de Louvercy called to him and asked him to hold his horse. I got down and helped M. de Louvercy to alight. Then we entered the churchyard, and passed under the pointed porch, to the lively surprise of the servant, who was not accustomed to see M. Roger within those precincts.

The interior of the church is very simple; a small nave, white and bare. I walked before M. de Louvercy, whose crutch resounded on the pavement and under the vaulted arches. We proceeded through two rows of seats to the place reserved for Madame de Louvercy. I pointed to a low seat covered with a cushion, and said to him in a whisper, "Your mother's fold-stool." Then I supported him by the arm while he knelt on it; he abandoned himself like an infant. He leaned his head on his hand, and I knelt at his side. While I prayed for us both with all my soul, his heart softened and I heard him sobbing.

When we arose, letting me see his streaming face, he said, "See what you have made a soldier do!"

"And you are pardoned," I replied, taking his hand.

Soon after we departed, rapidly as always, but not with reckless speed. His emotion calmed; he became almost gay, and questioned the peasants whom we met here and

there on the way, informing himself in their affairs, and relating their history to me with interest. I knew already, however, that his misanthropy did not prevent him from doing much good in the country, where he is really liked.

We had just entered the park, when we saw at the turning of a path three persons walking slowly before us : they were Madame de Louverey, M. d'Éblis, and Cécile. They appeared greatly surprised to see me with M. Roger. "Mother," he cried laughing, "I meant to elope with Mademoiselle d'Erra, and it is she who ran away with me. And do you know where she took me? No, you do not even suspect. Come, I will leave her the pleasure of telling you herself."

I jumped to the ground, and taking Madame de Louverey, who seemed more and more mystified, aside, I whispered to her : "I took him to church ; he has prayed."

She uttered a cry ; and, clasping me to her heart with a kind of violence, she exclaimed, "Ah my dear, dear child !" And then, after a pause and a long sigh : "Now I have all my happiness at once, for—do you know? Cécile—" and she pointed to her, standing near M. d'Éblis.

"Yes I know," I said.

"Who would ever have thought that she would make such a wise choice ; and that he, on his side—well, surely God has his own days !"

Cécile, meanwhile, had taken my arm ; and she said to her aunt, in a pleading tone, "Leave me alone with her."

Madame de Louverey and M. d'Éblis pushed slowly forward, conversing with M. Roger, who was walking his horse. Cécile drew me along, and, following a short, winding path, made me enter with her a very retired part of the park which they call the Hermitage. The tradition of the country is that there was formerly in this place the abode of a hermit, evidences of whose presence are supposed to have been found in some remnants of masonry which are to-day half covered

by a hillock of greensward. The only ruin almost intact is a very small and ancient erection, in the form of a round arch, under whose shelter the source of a brook, which runs through the wood, gushes into a narrow reservoir. There is a patch of ground large enough to have been the garden of the ruined habitation, an opening in the wood which now forms a kind of promenade, with here and there groups of lofty trees. The place is of a singularly sweet and yet savage aspect, a sort of sacred vale of pleasant solitude, reminding one of those landscape nooks, wherein are depicted the sports of nymphs and shepherds around some antique fountain.

Cécile led me thither in silence; then, looking at me with uneasy tenderness and her face bathed in tears, she clasped me round the neck, crying: "Ah! I have stolen him from you—I have stolen him from you!"

I mingled my tears with hers, returning her caresses and murmuring: "What folly! What are you thinking of? Do not wilfully spoil your happiness by such a fancy."

"You have been so good to me," she pursued, weeping, "so generous! He has told me. Ah! you, only, are worthy of him—you, only! You did not love him *too* much—tell me?"

"No, indeed, dear; be calm: it was sympathy solely."

"But I—I adore him! Listen: it was here, in this lovely retreat, that he told me he loved me, that he asked me if I would be his wife. I should like to be buried here when I die; do you believe it would be possible?"

"I cannot tell, pet; but you say very absurd things, do you know?"

"Indeed, I think I am a little crazy. But will he be happy with me; do you believe he will? I want him to be happy—oh! so much."

"He will be happy, dear."



In a word nothing has been spared me. I cut this recital short, for my heart fails me. Meanwhile, what am I going to do? I shall see to-morrow. I shall consult my grandmother. I have determined to tell her everything.

*August 2nd.*

My grandmother learned last evening, as all the château did, the grand news of Cécile's engagement. Although certainly surprised and even in the highest degree indignant, she received the announcement with a calm serenity and a smile that set me a good example. To me she simply said, in parting from me on the staircase, "This gentleman has singular taste!"

This morning she anticipated me, and entered my room just as I awoke from a short sleep. After kissing me and clasping my hand tightly, she said: "My dear little girl, Mesdames de Sauves and de Chagres have just told me that they leave to-day with their brothers. Their conduct seems to me utterly ridiculous; it is a confession of their disappointment and spite; it is pitifully despicable. We have more pride than that, have we not, little one?"

"Yes, grandmamma."

"We know how to suffer with dignity; and, though it will be irksome, we will stay here a fortnight or three weeks longer to preserve our self-respect. At least, that is my advice. Do you feel brave enough?"

"I will try."

"Besides, little one, flight in such a case is no more reasonable than it is dignified. It is best to look things in the face, and get used to them. Don't you think so!"

"I can hardly say."

"Well, you will see. If it proves beyond your strength, we will go. Forgive me, child, if I am a little brutal with your grief, instead of petting you; really it is wiser. Trouble

ought never to be cherished. Kiss me; I love you very dearly, little one;" and she went to her own room to cry by herself, I think.

As for my meditations during the night, this is the result of them; I have so often, in society, heard eternal love ridiculed and constancy called a fable—above all, that of my own sex—that I find it a little difficult to believe myself an exception in this respect; still it is impossible for me to conceive that my heart, even in the most distant future, will ever open itself to a sentiment which shall expel that which I have already admitted there; right or wrong, I am sure that I shall always love the man whom I have once loved with all my heart, all my mind, all the power of my being and my life. It is not even possible, with such a sentiment in my heart, to imagine myself united to another. Unless I become greatly changed, which I neither expect nor desire, I shall never marry. As long as my grandmother is left to me, I shall live with her and for her. If I outlive her, I shall return to the convent in which I passed my youth, never to leave it. I feel that there I shall not be hopelessly unhappy; I shall take bitter regrets with me, no doubt, but I shall find consolation in its sacred precincts. Apart even from the poetry of the cloister and the sweet proximity of divine things, I shall find in my humble duties of instructress the illusion of maternal devotion, although I must always realise that it is an illusion. What I have done hitherto for Cécile, I shall do for others, and they will be my family.

With this plan for the future, I shall for the present obey the wishes of my grandmother; my own pride sympathises with hers. I should blush to betray a mortifying disappointment by a hasty departure. Doubtless I shall suffer much; but I think I experienced yesterday all that one can have of this kind of suffering.

*August 8th.*

My grandmother has had a long interview with Madame de Louvercy to-day. What it was about I cannot divine, but apparently the result of it has been a modification of our plans. Instead of leaving a fortnight hence, we go to-morrow. She has just told me so, saying that we have done all that our dignity demands. Her features showed great anxiety, and Madame de Louvercy, when I saw her leave my grandmother's room, seemed very much upset. Nothing, however, at all offensive passed between them; their attitude towards each other proves that; it is affectionate and even tender, although stamped with a peculiar melancholy. I give up the attempt to penetrate this fresh mystery; indeed, it disturbs me very little; its importance to me is that we owe our departure to it. I had, I confess, presumed too much on my courage; it is exhausted. The departure of the Valnesses and their sisters left me frequently alone with the two lovers; I was the smiling witness of their tête-à-têtes, their endearments, their happiness—the smiling and despairing witness. Jealousy is a frightfully complicated pang; it not only tears the heart, it degrades it. One feels not only tortured but abased. The wound is not open, it is not wholesome; the ulcers of pride, envy, hatred, mingle in it, rankle in it, and defile it. There is no passionate soul, I suppose, that, in some such cursed hour, is not capable of such unworthy feelings; the merit consists not in being incapable of them, but in abhorring and conquering them. With God's aid I have tried to do that—but I am glad we are going.

I have promised Cécile to return for her marriage, if she is married here, but I imagine that the ceremony will take place in Paris, and I much prefer that it should.

M. de Louvercy did not breakfast with us this morning. He will not come to dinner this evening. He is seriously unwell, it appears. I have noticed for some days that his manner was

more languid and ailing than usual. I am sorry to go away without seeing him again. I shall never see him again probably, for he does not leave Louvercy, and I hope never to return to it. Poor fellow ! I shall always appreciate what he did for me.

*August 9th.*

What a night !

Looking after our packing kept me on my feet till one o'clock in the morning. I had just sent away my maid, and was beginning to undress, when I thought I heard a door, on the landing opposite mine, cautiously open, then a light foot-step, a creaking of the wainscoting, the rustle of a dress on the stairs ; some one was descending the staircase, in a rather mysterious manner. Surprised and filled with some strange terror, I opened my door gently, and saw a faint light at the bottom of the staircase ; at the same time a murmur of words uttered in broken accents, and what seemed to me stifled groans, ascended to where I stood. I leaned over the baluster, and could just recognise Madame de Louvercy, who had paused, a candle in her hand, on the ground-floor landing ; she was leaning her forehead against the door of her son's apartment, and listening intently. Suddenly she opened the door warily and glided into the room.

I stood there, restless and palpitating, for two or three minutes, when a woman's cry—a sharp, grief-stricken cry—broke the deep silence of the night. I started forward, descending the staircase recklessly, and reached the door which Madame de Louvercy had left ajar. It opens into a sort of study, which leads into M. Roger's room. The study was plunged in darkness, but a ray of light penetrated thither through a heavy curtain which hid the doorway leading into the adjoining room. I listened anxiously in my turn, and my heart beat violently. Madame de Louvercy had entered the room ; she was sobbing, and at intervals her voice broke

out in accents of despairing entreaty. No voice replied. I was seized with a mortal terror; I believed some terrible misfortune had happened. Almost without reflection, I entered the study and noiselessly raised a corner of the curtain. Before me I saw M. Roger de Louvercy, seated in an arm-chair near a table; he had the rigidity and the pallor of a ghost, and looked with a fixed and speechless stare at his unhappy mother, who lay prostrate before him, with her hands clasped, and striking her forehead against his knees. I could also see on the table a large letter sealed with wax, and near it one of those oblong ebony boxes containing costly pistols. At length M. Roger muttered, in a dull, irritated tone, "Jean would have done better to have held his tongue!" (Jean was his orderly, and is now his confidential servant.)

"Oh, have pity, I beg of you!" replied Madame de Louvercy, midst her sobs. "Am I, then, nothing to you—nothing to you? O my God!"

He still hesitated. Then I saw him bend down and take his mother's head in his hand, and kiss her forehead. "Pardon," he said; "this hour of madness is over—wholly passed, I promise you."

"You promise me—you promise me truly, my dear child?"

"I promise you—only let her go, I beg of you; let me not see her again!"

"Yes, yes, that shall be done; you know she goes to-morrow—this very morning."

"And she shall never know of this?"

"Never! Oh, no!"

"Then good-night, mother; rest in peace. Once more forgive me; go in peace. You have my word; I swear it to you—I swear it! Take these pistols away with you, if you wish."

While they clasped each other in a tight embrace, I went out hastily; I mounted the staircase and regained my room.

The remainder of the night I spent in strange reflections. When day dawned, I went to my grandmother's room, and had a long conversation with her. She tried to tell me at first why Madame de Louvercy wished to hasten our departure. It was useless ; I knew it already.

I am going to sleep a little, and then I will resume.

*Same day.*

The resolution I formed last night was long and strenuously opposed by my grandmother. "Dear child," she said to me, "you know that as a rule I am not hostile to romance; but this is really too much! At your age, with your face, your figure, your education, your fortune, to marry an invalid is certainly very noble, very generous, very poetic; but, frankly, it transcends all bounds! And allow me to add, had you calmly and coolly taken such a resolution at any ordinary time, in complete freedom of mind and heart, in full possession of yourself—well, it would be different. But this is not the case. You have just suffered a disenchantment—a very keen deception. Good heavens! I shall never understand what that gentleman could have been thinking of, by-the-way. But be that as it may, you are, dear girl, in one of those states which engender false vocations. You must not trust too much to a first impulse of enthusiasm, which perhaps is only an impulse of despair. At least let us wait—let us wait a few months, let us allow time to pass over this whim; then if it is confirmed, if it grows stronger—well, we shall see! But, truly, I should not be doing my duty if I allowed you to engage in such a venture under the influence of your wounded heart, and of the emotion which last night's tragic scene has caused you."

Briefly summed up, these are the objections my grandmother put forward. I opposed them in my turn with all my conviction and all my eloquence: Undoubtedly, I was a

little romantic; but had she not herself encouraged this tendency in me? Had she not told me it was a guarantee of self-respect, and even of happiness? True, my heart was sore and suffering; but had not a wounded heart need of a great duty and a generous devotion to relieve and sustain it? Ought it not to find consolation and oblivion of its own lost happiness solely in the happiness of others? I did not conceal from her my design of some day entering a convent, if I should ever be unfortunate enough to find myself alone in the world; and, taking one sacrifice with another, was not the one that was here presented to me, loftier, more pious, more binding, less selfish in fact, than the mere renunciation of the world and the somewhat commonplace abnegation of an instructress? As for waiting, that would be to risk, perhaps, all the merit and benevolence of my act. Who knows if, in the interval, this unhappy young man would not relapse into one of those fits of despair to which I had just seen him a prey; who could tell if his mother would again be forewarned, if he would not succumb? One thing at least was certain, that to wait would deprive me of the best part of my reward—the joy that I promised myself in witnessing the sudden transport of these poor people from the excess of misery to an unhopcd-for happiness, in being the cause of it, in descending suddenly into their sombre life as an angel of light: that single moment of my existence would throw over the past, the present, and the future, a peace, a charm, and an infinite consolation.

My dear grandmother, with fast-flowing tears, at length gave in to my arguments. "Alas! poor little girl," murmured she in conclusion, "the world will say we are two fools."

"This is folly that God will bless," I rejoined.

"I believe it," said my grandmother, "but there is now another difficulty that stares me in the face."

"What can that be, in heaven's name?"

"How are we to broach this matter to the Louvercys? I must do justice to the poor mother. When she confided to me the unhappy passion of her son, she did not seem for an instant to entertain the idea—truly an inconceivable one, by-the-way—of a marriage between you two. And the young man has evidently no conception of it, either; which does honour to his good sense—but then, what is to be done? Must we offer ourselves, leap into their arms without even crying, 'Take care!' My dear girl, it is impossible; it is utterly improper."

"But, grandmamma, since we are sure they will not refuse us—?"

"Ah! good! That is all there is lacking in the matter. Well, any how, it is a very delicate piece of business—very delicate."

"Will you intrust it to me, grandmamma?"

"Why not, forsooth? As well take an ell as an inch. Since we are up to our necks in irregularities, another more or less doesn't matter. Still, I fancy you will nevertheless first address yourself to the mother?"

"Assuredly," I answered.

That is why I have just asked for a moment's conversation with Madame de Louvercy, and in a few minutes I shall be with her.

*Same day.*

Madame de Louvercy was with her son when my message was brought to her. She came up to my room instantly. Her countenance, which is one of the noblest that I know, was still very pale and disfigured by the terrible emotions of the night; nevertheless she smiled at me, though with a distracted air like that of a person whose thoughts were a thousand miles from the surprise I had in store for her. "My dear child," she said to me, "you want to bid me good-by; you are very kind; I am very glad myself to take leave



of you without any witnesses, for I can better say to you alone how much I shall miss you, how much I thank you for having been so obliging, so compassionate, towards all of us."

She took my hands as she spoke; she saw that I was extremely troubled; and felt that I was trembling. Her anxious features suddenly became alert, and her eyes sought mine with an expression of wonder and vague suspicion.

"Madame," I said, stammering a little, "I have to ask your forgiveness for something. I was very indiscreet last night—" She looked at me with a deeper and more intense scrutiny. "I heard you pass—then I heard you weeping. I feared that you were in need of assistance; I descended—"

"You know all?" she cried, in her turn trembling from head to foot.

"I know all, yes. I am profoundly touched by the sentiments with which I have inspired your son, deeply touched also by his misfortune; in a word, madame"—and I drew near her very gently—"are you willing to accept me as a daughter?"

Her whole body shook with a sudden paroxysm; her eyes, dilated, stupefied, and almost wild, remained fixed on mine; her half-open lips moved tremulously. She murmured in a low tone, "No, it is not possible."

"Will you take me for your daughter?" I asked again smiling.

Ah! what a cry she uttered! what a mother's cry, a happy mother's! I have no very clear recollection of what passed in the few moments that followed. I had half lost my senses, and she also. She clasped me to her breast, kissed me, half stifled me, called me the tenderest names, praying, weeping, mingling my name with that of God in her transports of gratitude. Ah! how happy was that moment!

When she recovered a little and recollected herself she asked, with anxiety, "And your grandmother?"

"She consents."

"Let us go to her." She drew me to my grandmother's room. After the first transports, very lively on both sides, my grandmother observed that, before we indulged our ecstasies further, it would perhaps be wise to discover the wishes of M. Roger himself. "Good heavens!" cried Madame de Louvercy, "my poor son—all that I ask is that he may not die of joy; but I do not wish to delay his happiness longer." And catching sight of herself in the mirror, with her lovely white hair all dishevelled, "How I look!" she said; "he will think me crazy." She smoothed her hair a little, and walked towards the door with the brisk and firm step of a young girl: indeed, the light in her eyes, the glad flush of her countenance, seemed to have suddenly made her ten years younger. Upon the point of going out, she stopped, and turning round, said, "He will never believe me, truly, he will not believe me," and she glanced timidly in my direction. I confess I was dying to go with her.

My grandmother, carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, pushed me forward by the shoulders. "Oh, run along, my dear, since we are fairly swimming in impropriety—run along," she cried.

Madame de Louvercy passed her arm through mine and drew me along almost running. "What a contrast to this horrible night!" she said, embracing me again as we descended the staircase. She opened the door of the ground-floor apartment, and begged me in a whisper to wait a moment in the study; then she raised the curtain and entered M. Roger's room.

Hardly was I alone in the study when I was suddenly struck by the strangeness, and, to tell the truth, by the impropriety, at least in appearance, of my position. I tried my best to recall everything that could justify my procedure, everything exceptional that there was in the circumstances

that had guided me, in the unhappy state of M. Roger, and the reserve it imposed on him; in vain I assured myself that by the force of circumstances the usual rôles had been reversed, I was not the less there, at his very door, awaiting his good pleasure like an Oriental slave, and, not being of a very humble temperament, I was, to say the least, very uncomfortable. This uneasy feeling became more painful in proportion as my solitude was prolonged, and time was left me for reflection on which I had not at all reckoned. My imagination had depicted this scene as an exact repetition, lively and rapid, of that which had so much moved me just before—astonishment, a cry, a start, rapture! But, instead of this minutes succeeded minutes; through the thickness of the curtain I could hear low whisperings, which seemed like an exchange of confidences, arguments for and against, a kind of formal debate. The blood left my heart and the floor swam under me, when at length the curtain was raised, displaying the countenance of Madame de Louvercy, not precisely sad, but serious and a little uneasy. “Will you come in, my child?” she said, sweetly.

I entered the room. M. de Louvercy was standing, leaning his wounded knee on a chair; his features had utterly lost their usual harassed and sarcastic expression; a kind of grave and almost solemn melancholy proudly intensified their pure lines; his eyes, encircled with deep blue furrows, seemed to me a little moist. He fixed his glance on me, and, speaking very slowly, as if to restrain an emotion that was almost bursting forth, he said: “Mademoiselle Charlotte, my mother has informed me of the feeling of angelic kindness which brings you here. If I were not the invalid that I am, I should be at your feet. I do not, however, accept your sacrifice; but that the thought of it came to you is enough to comfort and charm my life, to make my most profound, most tender gratitude follow you wherever you go, and bless

you always. And now, mademoiselle, do not, I pray you, prolong an ordeal that is truly beyond a man's strength. Let me remain firm in the resolution which honour prescribes to me; you will esteem me all the more highly—once more my thanks, and adieu!"

He bowed very low. His mother was weeping silently. I advanced a few steps towards him and frankly held out my hand. He took it and pressed it tightly. "My God!" he said, in an undertone. Then, looking long at me, "Excuse me, mademoiselle; I cannot find words; my heart is so full, my mind so troubled; I leap so suddenly from the very depths to heaven! But at least let me prove to you how thoroughly sincere I was a moment ago, how much I feared to abuse an impulse of generosity, a transport of enthusiasm. Take some time to reflect, I entreat you. In a few months—in a year, let us say—if you are of the same mind, if you are no more terrified at your great sacrifice than you are to-day—yes, I will accept it. But until that time let me relieve you of all obligation, and return you your absolute freedom."

As he had kept my hand, I had no need of giving it to him to cement our agreement, with which Madame de Louvercy appeared well satisfied, hoping, perhaps—and perhaps with reason—that it would have the same fate as many other modern treaties. As for me, I replied simply: "As you choose, monsieur; but I shall not change. *Au revoir*—for the present—for you no longer stipulate that we depart at once, I presume? You will grant us a reprieve of a few days?"

He nodded, smiling, and kissed my hand. Then his mother and I withdrew. My grandmother, when she learned the result of this interview, declared that M. de Louvercy's conduct had been perfectly correct and honourable. I think the same; and, after having been so much shocked and mor-

tified at the lack of eagerness with which he welcomed and replied to me, I feel that I should, nevertheless, have sincerely regretted it if he had acted otherwise. I appreciate him for his hesitation and his scruples, although I am sure, on reflection, that there is something more that he did not tell me. Yes, undoubtedly, he fears to profit by an impulse born of a romantic enthusiasm which I might hereafter repent; but he fears, also, to accept the gift of a wounded heart, which perhaps is not yet, and possibly never will be, healed of its wound. For it is certain that he at least suspects my attachment to M. d'Éblis. He could not ask an explanation of me; but, however delicate this may be, I shall explain all to him some day or other, and, as he is an honourable man, he will be pleased with me. Yes, it is a wounded heart, a bleeding heart, that I offer him; but still a heart that is devoted and faithful.

*August 25th.*

I was certainly inspired. I do not wish, though, to deceive myself. I am not happy; I can never be happy hereafter. I have felt a happiness too great, too perfect, to obtain consolation for having lost it. But still the constant thralldom of this single thought has ceased; my life has again a purpose and a future; I have created a duty which will fill its void, which will occupy me, and even attract me. Surely it is an attractive task to relieve little by little a desolate soul, to withdraw it from despair, to return peace and smiling contentment to it, to bring it back to submission, to happiness, to God. These are the cares to which I consecrate myself, with a tender interest, which will daily increase more and more, as a mother's affection for a sick child; and it will leave him who is the object of it, I hope, nothing to regret.

Already he sees, he understands, all that I am giving him, and with what sincerity I bestow it. I just allude to it;

he divines the rest, and he seems happy. As I imagined, our treaty no longer holds good; he insists, it is true, that I shall observe the delay arranged; I do not resist, but I remain, and he does not complain. I fancy we shall be married in a few weeks.

It was necessary to confide this great secret to Cécile and her "fiancé." M. de Éblis did not seem at all surprised; he simply said to me, "It is worthy of you." As for Cécile, after a few seconds of complete stupefaction, she went into a kind of fit of joy and tenderness, which still lasts. We shall be cousins, almost sisters: it was her dream. And then she fancies that this marriage will rivet our intimacy still more firmly, and that our separate existences will become, so to speak, commingled. Herein she is mistaken; she will remain the dearest of my friends; but it is likely that we shall live, for some time at least, more apart than hitherto. Until now, discouragement has prevented M. de Louvercy from yielding to the advice of his physicians, who recommend him to sojourn in the south at the sea-side. Now he wants to live, so I have already spoken of an establishment at Nice for the winter, and I notice that he is pleased for more than one reason, perhaps.

Here I close my locked diary, never to reopen it, I trust. I believe that, once married, a woman should have no confidant but her husband. Adieu, then, romantic and impulsive Charlotte!

## PART II.

1878.

THE extraordinary circumstances in which I find myself after the lapse of five years, induce me to continue my journal. I am passing through a terrible ordeal : there has never been more necessity for order in my thoughts and conscience. In the first place, I want to recall to my mind the principal events which have led up to my present position, and try and draw from them the light and counsel of which I stand so much in need. I have, too, a presentiment that these pages may one day be read by another, and for that reason wish that there should not be any obscurity in them.

My marriage, as I had foreseen, took place at the same time as Cécile's, in the little church of Louvercy. M. and Madame d'Éblis set out the next day for Italy, where they were to travel for several months. Five or six weeks later I started for Nice, with my husband and my mother-in-law. My husband's health gave me the only serious anxiety that I knew during nearly four years we passed in that charming climate. I cannot say that my heart was always free from regrets, from melancholy memories ; but I can say that God really blessed the Quixotism of my marriage, and that I enjoyed all the happiness that I had promised myself. It is untrue that the pleasures of passion take but one form, as we are too apt to think. There is some happiness in passion under the form of duty, devotion, and sacrifice ; there is some, they say, in martyrdom itself. There was, be it understood, no question of martyrdom in my case ; but still a task like that

which I had set myself<sup>d</sup> has some difficulties and some drawbacks; it requires more than a day for the tenderest and best-loved hand to conquer and heal a spirit that is naturally violent and made more so by misfortune. But then what an almost holy joy there is in fighting for this spirit against revolt and doubt, and of discovering, little by little, that, beneath the ruins of the body where it lies enshrouded, it is wholly pure! For some discouraged tears that I have shed in secret, how many were the sweet, happy grateful ones that came to me as I felt my efforts rewarded! And at last the time arrived when I had but to raise my finger with a smile to appease at once those frightful fits of anger, to which my poor Roger had formed the habit of abandoning himself.

I ought to add, lest I may boast too much, that the honour of this miracle was not due to myself alone; for it was from the birth of my daughter that her father, really forgave our heavenly Father.

It was just before her birth that Cécile and her husband, on their return from Rome, came to pass a few days with us at the villa of Palms, where we were living. I had secretly dreaded the moment when I should see M. d'Éblis again; but the great event in store for me rendered me almost indifferent to his presence, or at least I believed myself to be so. Besides, he was so icily ceremonious towards me, that I was tormented with the idea that he had some grievance to charge me with. Was he discontented with Cécile, and did he reproach me for having drawn too flattering a portrait of her when he consulted me? A certain difference in his bearing towards his wife surprised me; he no longer appeared to be under the spell of her charm. Although he was always extremely courteous, there was a somewhat dry irony in his tone when speaking to her. At times he seemed wearied by the fantastic accounts which she gave us of her travels, her often intentional confusion of names, things, and



dates, her impish assumption of erudition, and her pretty, bird-like prattle. But M. de Louvercy, to whom I spoke of my anxieties, assured me that the Commandant d'Éblis was, on the contrary, more in love with his wife than ever; that he was a little alarmed, perhaps, at seeing her so brilliant and sparkling, and so much admired, but that was all. So I thought no more of it. I was too happy and too much occupied with my approaching maternity to think much of anything else.

We had decided to leave Nico at the end of the spring, and to return to Louvercy for the summer; my husband rejecting absolutely all idea of an establishment at Paris. But the physicians were afraid of his sojourning in the country, and particularly in the damp climate of Normandy. Upon their advice, we decided to remain in the south until his health should become more settled. The two years which followed brought me almost perfect serenity. My dear grandmother paid us two or three visits; my mother-in-law evinced a passionate tenderness for me; then, too, I had my daughter, and her birth, as I have said, had reconciled my husband to life, and had attached him even more warmly to me. He was full of ardour for his work, in which I humbly seconded him in the capacity of secretary, classifying, to the best of my ability, the documents with which M. d'Éblis kept us well supplied, making extracts, and copying, in my daintiest handwriting, his illegible scrawl. The active and earnest friendship which he had inspired in M. d'Éblis was no longer a mystery to me, as I confess it had been before, when he had allowed only his faults to be seen; but, since he had ceased to fancy himself condemned to an isolated existence, without affection or prospects, his great qualities of mind and heart had reappeared in all their lustre and all their captivating charm. He had even assumed a gaiety which, in the beginning of our acquaintance, I had seen far from

suspecting in him. It was sweet to me to think that I had played an intimate part in all these metamorphoses.

But what touched me more than anything else was the absolute confidence he placed in me. When I married him, I had said to myself that all worldly life was ended for me, and I had honestly resolved to renounce it; it could not be agreeable to me to seek pleasures that my husband could not share. But he insisted that I should accompany his mother to some of the gatherings of the French and foreign colony which was gaily whirling around us. I did not abuse his permission; but I was happy to profit by it occasionally in order that I might receive sometimes at my own house. I was naturally exposed, on the part of some of our guests and neighbours, to those gallantries that are addressed to every woman gifted with a passable exterior or a skilful dress-maker. An infirm and ailing husband might seem to offer an encouragement to these overtures; but I met them with that tranquil reserve by which it is always easy for a woman to show that she is not to be trifled with. My husband, with his delicate insight and subtle appreciation, spoke to me laughingly of these annoyances; he took pride, I think, in showing me by his sovereign indifference how high was the position I held in his esteem above the shadow of a suspicion. I perfectly appreciated it in him, but his confidence seemed to me excessive, for it plunged me into some rather serious embarrassments, which are unhappily connected with the greatest grief of my life.

There was, then, as there always is at Nice, a mixed society in which it was necessary to make distinctions. I am naturally somewhat exclusive, and I do not lend myself willingly to certain conciliations which have become a little too fashionable in these latter days. M. de Louvercy, like all his sex, I think, was more tolerant and liberal than I in these matters. He pretended that my drawing-room was a

fold into which I admitted only lambs that were without blemish and sheep incapable of going astray ; that it was dull, lacked spirit, and, what is more, lacked charity, for it was discouraging to sinners of both sexes, and calculated to drive them to final impenitence, to shut the doors of honest houses against them, where they might learn to amend their ways through the general good atmosphere and example. To all his arguments I remained quite insensible ; I replied gaily that I had no mission to regenerate society, that having reformed him I had done enough for the edification of my life, and that I asked for nothing more.

In the spring of the third year of our sojourn at Nice, the young Prince Viviane came to live in the villa next to us. He brought with him a grand stud of horses, and a lady who was said to be English ; and she must have been, if one might judge by the prismatic splendour of her toilets. Although my grandmother was connected with the dowager-princess, I did not remember ever to have seen the son, who led a not very creditable life, sometimes at Paris, but more frequently at the various watering-places. He had hardly arrived when our colony was scandalised by his unrestrained dissipations, his reckless gambling, and his equivocal household. My husband, who had been one of his college friends, and who still felt a sort of affection for him, was nevertheless annoyed at his arrival, and especially at his proximity. However, it so happened that during the commencement of his stay at Nice we did not meet him.

I was walking one morning with my daughter and her nurse in the garden of our villa, which consisted of several terraces communicating with each other by long marble steps. The lowest of these terraces was close to the public road, which was reached by a final flight of about a dozen steps, with an iron gate at the foot, that stood open during the day. We were leaning on the railing and looking out at

the white sails on the blue sea, which seemed to have a fascination for my daughter. The noise of approaching horses drew our attention to the road, and we saw a short distance off a horseman accompanied by a lady in a very elaborate and very ugly riding-habit, and wearing among her many adornments a magnificent white feather, curled round her hat. She seemed to me, nevertheless, very beautiful. Just as this couple passed beneath our garden, my little girl was seized with great excitement, which speedily degenerated into frenzy; she stretched out her hands, screaming with all her might, while the nurse, who was an Italian, sang her most soothing repertory to her. This concert caused the horseman to raise his eyes; he became aware of my presence, looked fixedly at me, and raised his hat. Then, reining in his horse, "What is the matter with your baby, nurse?" cried he, laughing. Greatly surprised at this familiarity, I drew back a little and told the nurse not to reply. The woman did not understand me, and coolly engaged in conversation with the horseman over the wall. "I think," she ended by saying, "the little one wants madame's white feather." "Give her your feather, Sarah," said the young man, turning towards his companion, who immediately took the feather out of her hat and threw it in the direction of the terrace. But the feather being too light fell short. The young man caught it as it dropped, and threw it again with more force, but with no greater success. "Oh, well," said he, very loud, "I will take it to the little thing myself." At the same instant the clink of the horse's hoofs sounded on the marble steps; the animal slipped, fell back, and shivered with fright.

I heard all this from behind the cluster of orange-trees where I had taken refuge, and I was wondering in some terror who this madman could be, when suddenly I saw him appear upon the smooth grass of the terrace like an equestrian statue,

and advance triumphantly towards us. He bowed again to me, this time profoundly, and leaned over to place the feather in the hands of the child, whom this sudden vision had already appeased. Then, raising his hat for the third time, he descended the steps on his horse, I do not know how. When I related this adventure to my husband, a few minutes after, he said: "That must be Viviane; it is exactly his way."

It was he, in fact. The same evening he presented himself at our house, giving as an excuse his former acquaintance with M. de Louvercy. I saw a tall, fair-haired young man, very thin, with bold eyes, delicate, beautiful features, and a bored expression, a face of the court of the Valois. He laughed readily, and was very witty. My husband received him with much cordiality. I was more reserved myself, and hardly thanked him for the trouble he had taken about the feather, not knowing exactly whether his politeness was addressed to my daughter, the nurse, or myself.

This visit was followed by many others at short intervals. I felt that his vivacity, and keen though often absurd humour, amused my husband; still I could not bring myself to seek to attract or to retain him. The prince had too much penetration and knowledge of the world not to perceive the icy reserve which I always manifested towards him; and, in spite of his perfect self-possession, he sometimes seemed disconcerted. My husband noticed this, and even allowed it to annoy him. "My dear child," he said to me one day as the prince was leaving us, "Viviane is going away quite crushed. When it suits you, you can really treat people in the most petrifying manner imaginable. Come, tell me, what has this poor fellow done to annoy you?"

"Nothing, dear."

"No? Does he bore you, then? Does he make himself too amiable? If so, I shall laugh at his amiability, as you

know ; but I will receive him less amicably, so as to spare you that kind of annoyance."

"I assure you," I replied, "that there is absolutely nothing. I have never met the prince outside of my own drawing-room, and there, you know, he is propriety itself."

"Well, then, my dear, permit me to say you are not—that you treat him with an indifference that is really wounding."

"But, my dear, if I should encourage him ever so little, the first thing he would do would be to bring here that young woman who is at his house."

"Oh, come now! You cannot mean that."

"Perhaps not ; but you know I hate disorder in all its forms. You know I cannot bear to see a piece of furniture out of place ; and for the same reason I cannot endure a man out of the paths of order and honour. For my part, I haven't at all the weakness for fast men which they generally attribute to my sex ; and, besides, this one has a special claim to the antipathy which I cannot avoid showing. You are not ignorant of the connection between his mother and my grandmother ; I have been a witness more than once to the tears and despair of the poor princess on account of her son ; for a long time he has occupied a very indifferent position in my imagination and esteem, and his actual conduct, you must confess, is not of a nature to improve it."

"That is all very well, my dear, but as for the poor princess, I would dispense with any pity for her ; it is she who has ruined her son by idolising him on bended knee, and persuading him that heaven and earth were created for his particular amusement. I remember that she once bought the carriage and goats of the Champs-Élysées for him. The result is that he is going to marry, so it is said, this actress from Drury Lane. Well, it is logical."

"It is logical, my dear, but it is very unpleasant."

It was a week before we again saw the prince at our house.

He came at last one morning and shut himself up with M. de Louvercy. They had a long conversation, of which my husband afterwards gave me an account. Prince Viviane, it appears, excused himself for having ceased his visits, by alleging, with a sort of melancholy, that he had felt they were not agreeable to me. My husband, touched by his serious and mortified tone, replied to him confidentially that he ought not to be surprised that his somewhat unconventional life should be a trifle startling to a young woman brought up in the strictest principles; that it depended entirely upon himself, moreover, to dissipate the unfavourable opinions which seemed to affect him so much, and that his friends of both sexes would gladly make their relations with him more easy and intimate.

"I am generally very indifferent to the opinion of the world," said the prince, "but I confess it has been hard for me to endure the contempt of Madame de Louvercy."

"There is no question of contempt, my dear fellow," said my husband; "it is only the embarrassment of the thing." Thereupon they separated, the prince very pensive.

Two days after, on my return from a walk, my husband told me that M. de Viviane had just gone away. "I have asked him to dine with us to-morrow," added he. I opened my eyes wide; he began to laugh, and said: "He has sent the Englishwoman away, and invited his mother to come. That deserves some reward!" I agreed; and, when the prince came next day, I extended my hand with more warmth than had been my custom. We became better friends from that day, and he was unreservedly admitted into my circle.

However, as if to recompense himself, he had again gone in for heavy play; he generally lost, which, however, did him honour. He told me one evening that he had just won about thirty thousand francs at baccarat. "You are truly a terrible man," replied I, shrugging my shoulders. "When one raises

*you on one side, you fall on the other!" Thereupon he drew from his pocket a great roll of bank-bills, and presented them to me.*

"For your poor," said he.

"I accept," said I, "on one condition; that is, that you give me your word never to touch a card again."

"I give it to you."

And that is how I was enabled to send thirty thousand francs to my grandmother for her young apprentices' charity.

Finally—for he had a very complete assortment of vices—he presented himself at our house a little elevated, not to say intoxicated. There is nothing in the world of which I have so great a horror as a man in this state, and I wonder at the women—there are very many of them, alas!—who think the thing a joke, or who do not even notice it. The prince could not fail to appreciate the sentiments which he inspired in me on such occasions as this. He tried to control himself, and became reasonably sober. And thus he crowned that series of reformations, accomplished through my entreaties, and seemingly dedicated to me. These little triumphs, which diverted my husband (he laughed to see the prince modestly holding worsted at my feet) did not fail to interest and flatter me also; but at the same time they alarmed me a little. I thought over all these sacrifices, asking myself if he did not expect some compensation for them. These vague apprehensions continued to keep me on the defensive with him, which did not escape his notice. We were walking one evening on one of the terraces; the beauty of the night, the almost suffocating odour of the orange-trees and violets with which the air was charged, had the effect of raising his discourse to the most poetic and sentimental heights. As I recalled him to earth rather dryly, "Great heavens! madame," said he, "I do not know what more I can do to disarm your suspicions. To please



you, I have thrown all my faults into the sea, one after the other. I have deprived myself of everything; I play no more, I drink no more, etc. What do you wish now? Shall I turn monk to please you? Tell me!" "I wish only one thing more," I replied, simply; "which is, that you should never make me question your friendship for my husband." He bowed very respectfully, and from that moment every equivocal shade disappeared from his language.

It was about this time that Cécile and her husband came to see us at Nice for the second time. My correspondence with Cécile had not ceased to be very frequent. To judge by her letters she was happy, although she seemed to seek her principal pleasures in worldly life. I found her more beautiful and very charming, but in no way modified by her marriage, and as volatile as ever. There was a constraint in her attitude towards her husband which struck me forcibly. As for him, he seemed very gentle towards her, but very reserved. I was astonished and almost frightened on this second occasion to feel how much he had retained his influence over me, in spite of the time which had elapsed. I could not hear the sound of his voice without being deeply moved. He had not been twenty-four hours with us when I sought some means of abridging his stay. He furnished it himself by a very ill-advised indiscretion, which I have explained to myself since, but which at the time seemed perfectly incomprehensible.

Had my husband discovered in his heart some secret warning of what was passing in mine? Or did he feel the first approaches of the cruel malady which threatened him? I know not; but after the first days which followed the arrival of M. and Madame d'Éblis he grew very gloomy. One morning M. d'Éblis asked me, in a tone of embarrassment, if I had remarked this alteration in Roger's character. Upon my replying in the affirmative, he permitted himself, half

laughing and half seriously, to allude to the assiduities of Prince Viviane towards me, insinuating that they might awaken the susceptibilities of my husband. I knew that M. de Louvercy was perfectly at ease, and that he was even too much so, on the score of the prince. I was certain, therefore, that the Commandant d'Éblis was not in this instance his interpreter, and that he was speaking on his own account. That annoyed me beyond expression. I am not a saint. I had pardoned him as well as I could for having preferred Cécile to myself, and for having married her after making love to me; but that he should pretend, after all that, to arrogate to himself the right of conjugal surveillance over me, was a little too much. "My dear sir," said I to him, "since you have the kindness to interest yourself in the secrets of my fireside, and in my domestic peace, I would say to you that you are at the same time right and wrong in your suppositions. You are right, I believe, to attribute the moodiness of my husband to a slight feeling of jealousy, but you are absolutely mistaken as to the object." At these words he became very pale, bowed, and left me. Two days after he announced that he had been called back to Paris, and he set out the same evening, leaving his wife with us.

I remember that the day after his departure Cécile suddenly asked me a singular question. "Do you believe," said she, "that my husband is happy?"

"Surely, my dear, you ought to know better than I."

"I fear," replied she, shaking her pretty little head—"I fear that he is not; I am too frivolous, too worldly, too much carried away by pleasure. I drag him after me like a martyr, poor man! I reproach myself for it, and yet I continue. It is always the demon which is in me, you know. He has not complained? He has not told you that he was unhappy? Truly?"

I told her with truth that I had received no confidences

from M. d'Éblis, and she speedily resumed her good-humour. She remained with us about a fortnight; and, though my friendship for her was still as active and as tender as ever, I did not see her depart without relief. Though a perfectly honest woman, she was too brilliant to be easily protected. The five parts of the world, which have their representatives at Nice, buzzed around her in swarms, and my husband pretended that he would have to put her night and day under guard. Though wearied with all this kind of homage, she still liked it, and felt a little ill-will towards those who refused it to her. She therefore was greatly piqued by the marked indifference shown her by Prince Viviane. She said that I had made a simoleon of him, and that I would have to lead him about with a rose-coloured ribbon.

Alas! all gaiety went with her. Some weeks after her departure, my husband's health, which seemed to have become more settled, altered materially; the most frightful and aggravating symptoms succeeded each other. The remainder of his poor life was nothing more than an agony for him and for me, and towards the end of the following winter I had the terrible grief of losing him. After so much severe suffering he died almost calmly, thanking me for having given him a few happy years. M. d'Éblis, who had come to be with him in his last anguish, mourned him despairingly. I pass briefly over these bitter memories: God knows that the expression of my grief, violent as it was, did not lack sincerity, but at the time at which I write it would be wanting in propriety.

I passed the first months of my mourning with my mother-in-law, and then I came to Paris to live with my grandmother, expecting henceforth to divide my existence between these two dear relatives.

Great moral agitations, like those which had come to me,

seem at first to suspend life ; our tastes, our feelings, our passions, are dumb, as if stupefied by the blow, and one fancies them dead. Little by little the heart begins to beat, the mind to think, and it is at first almost an extra grief—this importunate persistence of life. Then one reconciles one's self to it, for God has willed it so.

In my new existence my daughter naturally held the first place ; but this interest, great as it was, did not absorb my whole heart. I had again found dear friends at Paris, and among the dearest and most faithful were Cécile and her husband. I saw Cécile almost every day ; she recounted to me, with her sparkling animation, the current stories of the city and the world at large<sup>4</sup>, she enlivened my solitude, she lavished the tenderest attentions upon me, and my affection for her returned in all its strength. I saw her husband more rarely ; but he neglected no opportunity to be useful or agreeable to me. In the grievous trials through which I had passed, in the midst of the sad details which always accompany such events, and the painful questions of business which must be attended to, he showed a fraternal devotion for and gave every assistance to me. The will of M. de Louvercy had made him the guardian of my daughter, and he seemed to have transferred to her the only passionate sentiment of his life—the heroic friendship he had felt for her father. It is needless to say that I had completely pardoned the strange indiscretion which he had committed in relation to Prince Viviane. He remembered it himself only to seek to repair it by treating the prince with a particularly good grace wherever he met him, and especially at my house. For the prince was then living at Paris, and I received him often and familiarly, having been well pleased with him during the last months of my stay at Nioc.

The only grief which M. d'Eblis caused me he caused involuntarily and unconsciously. I could simply reproach

myself for the restless kind of pleasure with which I awaited his visits, and the secret emotion by which I always felt agitated in his presence. But I hoped sincerely that this unfortunate remnant of my old attachment would vanish little by little, and finally lose itself in the habits of every day life. I hoped so all the more as his respectful courtesy and his cold and grave manner towards me were calculated to calm my heart rather than trouble it.

However, I occupied myself with extreme, and, as I then thought, purely affectionate solicitude, with his attitude toward Cécile and the state of their relations, and the turn their marriage had taken. Nothing appeared to me more singular and more mysterious than their position towards each other and their mutual bearing. As I had noticed at Nice from several clear intimations, it was Cécile who, contrary to all logic, appeared to have usurped the sceptre in this household. She had seized the authority which the intellectual and moral superiority of her husband ought naturally to have exercised, and M. d'Éblis, to all appearances, did not suffer from it. He submitted to the worldly and dissipated tastes of his young wife with an indifference or a resignation that were inexplicable. After having for a long time accompanied her into society which he did not enjoy, he commenced to allow her to go alone. All this surprised me much. I asked myself what passed between them in their private life, whether they loved each other, whether they were happy. Not being able to question either of them upon points so delicate, I studied curiously, almost with avidity, their language, their conduct, the expression of their faces, their manner towards each other, in order to throw some light on the matter. But M. d'Éblis, with his severe grace, had an impassibility, sometimes grave, sometimes smiling like a sphinx, and Cécile was equally baffling in her very frivolity.

The world, like myself, was astonished at the peculiarities which this household offered, and had even begun to talk of them. One day the Commandant d'Éblis was at my house when Prince Viviane arrived. M. d'Éblis, following his custom, sometimes a trifle too polite, withdrew almost immediately, after having exchanged a few friendly words with the prince. When he had gone the latter said: "M. d'Éblis pleases me infinitely, but he is a veritable enigma to me."

"Why, an enigma?"

"Because, with all the goodness and all the honour in the world, he seems to have sworn to allow his charming wife to be ruined."

"I really do not understand you."

"What! Don't you see that he leaves her to herself more and more? He does even worse than leaving her to herself, as he allows her to take Madame Godfrey for a chaperon."

"Who is this Madame Godfrey?"

"Madame Godfrey, madame, was formerly a very beautiful and much-courted woman, to say no worse of her; to-day she is one of those stars that are in their declension, and which, being unable to pretend to direct homage, manage to receive it obliquely by surrounding themselves with young satellites, and profiting by their reflection."

"I thank you for this information," said I, "and, if Madame Godfrey is in fact a dangerous companion, be sure that Cécile will at once break off her relations with her. However, I will explain to you in one word what appears so inexplicable in the conduct of M. d'Éblis. M. d'Éblis has confidence in his wife, and permit me to assure you that confidence was never better placed. I have known Cécile from childhood, and with all her apparent giddiness, with or without Madame Godfrey, I affirm that she is even incapable of a wrong thought."

"Oh, of course! Yes, up to the present, certainly!" replied the prince. "All women begin by being virtuous; but, when they lead this kind of a life, wrong thoughts come quickly, and wrong actions even more quickly. It is very strange, but it is true."

"Prince, these are your old man's memories of the time when you doubted if there were any upright women in the world."

"On my honour, now as always, I believe there are only a few. Pardon me! Allow me! I am now speaking of the worldly ones, the excited and giddy ones who do not stop to take breath. Well, madame, will you credit my experience, which is quite considerable for its age? You have a daughter. Being born of you and educated by you, she can only be a good woman. Believe me, however, never have the weakness to allow her to become passionately fond of the world, at least not absorbingly. I am going to tell you some horrible things, but we men have one maxim which has become an axiom; it is that a woman, however virtuous she may be, ceases to be so after a heated carnival, or even—you will shudder—after three or four hours of a cotillon. Then arises a physiological phenomenon which I confine myself to merely indicating to you; but, in short, it is no longer a woman that we hold in our arms, no longer a human creature, a thinking and conscious being; it is no longer anything but—how shall I tell you?—a sensitive plant ready to droop and fade at the slightest touch. Then, at the first opportunity, the wrong action, as I have had the honour of telling you, precedes the thought. She is still a virtuous woman, but a fallen one! Of course, madame, it is almost unnecessary to add that some escape; and, to return to your cousin, though she is very wild, I am willing to believe, as you say so, that she will belong to the latter category. But it will be an event, and worthy to be mentioned in history."

I did not attach any undue importance to these impertinent theories ; but the language of the prince, without leaving in my mind any doubt of Cécile, did not the less confirm my personal observations of the mysterious and troubled character of her household.

A circumstance which shortly followed my conversation with Prince Viviane served to finally enlighten me. Cécile and her husband were dining with me one day ; Cécile, who was looking her best and in a dazzling toilet, was going to a ball in the evening with Madame Godfrey, who called for her at half-past nine. My grandmother, being a little indisposed, kept her room, so that my daughter and I were left alone with M. d'Éblis. My daughter ought to have been in bed ; but, as with all children, a great deal of urging was required to accomplish this ceremony, and, at the request of her guardian, I had granted her a reprieve. Immediately after Cécile's departure, feeling a little embarrassed by this sort of tête-à-tête with M. d'Éblis, I seated myself at the piano : M. d'Éblis sat upon a sofa at the other end of the room, and, while I was playing one of Chopin's melodies, I heard him talking in low tones with my daughter, whom he petted a great deal, and whose very great friend he was. After a little while they both became silent ; there was a mirror before me, and, raising my eyes to it, I saw M. d'Éblis leaning on the table, his forehead resting on his hand. A minute after, my daughter, who had approached me quietly, gently pulled my sleeve ; I leaned a little to one side without stopping my playing, and the child whispered in my ear, "Mamma, he is crying !" At this confidence of the poor little thing, a sort of languid intoxication diffused itself throughout my veins, and my whole being. These are momentous seconds in the life of a woman.

The door opened ; the nurse came after my daughter. I kissed her, she went and kissed M. d'Éblis, and retired. I



continued to play without daring to raise my eyes to the glass, and I tried to collect my thoughts and understand clearly what was passing. The sudden emotion of M. d'Éblis in the presence of my daughter and myself, after the departure of his wife, left me no doubt that he was profoundly unhappy. Anything more I could not get even a glimpse of. But, if I could not read his heart, I read my own clearly, and what I discovered there frightened me. I could no longer deceive myself as to the kind of interest that induced me to study Cécile's domestic secrets so curiously. I loved her husband, and I loved him enough to desire the disruption of his household, and to rejoice in it.

A thousand times in my life I have observed that it does not depend on ourselves to experience or not to experience criminal feelings, but that it does always depend upon ourselves not to allow them to pass into actions. I have observed, further, that the best and perhaps the only means of combating and conquering evil passions is not to oppose abstract arguments of reason, conscience, or honour to them, but to act against them effectively, and in a manner to force the hand to do good when the heart desires evil. My resolution taken, I wanted to execute it without delay.

It required, first of all, a frank and complete explanation with M. d'Éblis. This was a trial the dangers of which I did not disguise from myself, although I was far from foreseeing all their gravity. But it seemed to me necessary to brave them; and, in the excitement of my enthusiasm, I believed myself certain of conquering them.

I left the piano suddenly and approached M. d'Éblis, who pretended to be attentively reading. "I want to speak with you," said I to him; "come into the garden, please." He looked at me with an air of extreme astonishment, rose without replying, and followed me.

Our house in the Rue St. Dominique has, by rare good

fortune, preserved its<sup>6</sup> secular garden, to which an environment of high walls, groups of gigantic plane trees, a bubbling fountain, and a vaulted greenhouse, lend the sweet and solemn aspect of the court-yard of a Spanish cloister. The drawing-room on the ground-floor leads into it by two or three steps. Although it was then the middle of November, the evening was exceptionally serene and mild. We proceeded a few paces in silence. I still hear, and I shall hear all my life, that silence, broken only by the rustle of the dry leaves under our feet and the murmur of the little fountain.

At last, summoning all my courage, "Monsieur," said I to him, "you know to what extent I carry my love for order and my dislike to disorder<sup>7</sup>; it is a passion, a mania about which you have often teased me, but which you pardon in me, do you not? Well, will you permit me to try and re-establish order in a household in which I take much interest?"

"In what household, madame?" he asked, quite severely, seating himself beside me on the bench where I was already seated.

"In what but yours, naturally? I am sensible—do not doubt it—of the extent of my indiscretion; but, if my friendship for Cécile and for you does not suffice to excuse it in your eyes, remember that you were good enough to ask my advice before marrying Cécile, that I advised that union, and allow me to discharge my responsibility."

"But, madame, I reproach you with nothing."

"And you are right, as that would be very unjust, for, if you had followed the advice which I allowed myself to give you—at your own entreaty, moreover—you would both be happy; and you are not, either of you."

"Pardon me, madame, but it seems to me that Cécile, at least, to whom I allow the most entire freedom, should be perfectly happy."

"*Cécile does not complain,*" said I, with some warmth ; "but to suppose that she can be perfectly happy when you live your life and she hers, when you neglect her, when you intrust her to the first comer, when you prove to her more and more that you care neither for her affection nor even for her reputation, is to suppose that she has no intelligence, no heart, no honour—and I know that she has them all !"

"Good heavens, madame !" he returned, in a constrained voice, that was nevertheless moved and unsteady, "neither am I accustomed to complain, but really you force me to it. Tell me, have you ever considered the fate of a man occupied with serious thoughts, loving work, and ambitious of the honour that it brings, who has dreamed of the joys of study in the charm and retirement of his fireside, and whom his wife drags after her day and night into the noisy emptiness and perpetual whirl of fashionable life ? It is very well to feel that duty, and even prudence, demands that he should follow her—when he sees at last that her whole life is passed there—that this child, this simpleton to whom he is bound, robs him, degrades him, destroys his intelligence, his future, his dignity, his life—what would you have then ?—he loses heart, he gives up, discouraged in everything, and utterly resigned !"

Surprised and almost frightened by this violent outburst from one habitually so much the master of himself, I said to him, more gently : "But come, monsieur, frankly, have you in all sincerity made every effort to reform *Cécile's* tastes !"

After a long pause, "I have made none," he said, coldly.

"Surely, then, you are much to blame. I told you once, and I repeat it to-day with the same conviction, with the same certainty : *Cécile* was a spoiled child, but her faults were only superficial ; she loved and respected you ; you had entire control over her, and there were no sacrifices that you could not have obtained from her !"

"And by what right could I have demanded them of her?" resumed M. d'Éblis. "My conscience forbade it. What had I to give her in exchange for the pleasures that she might have sacrificed for me? One asks such sacrifices only from the woman one loves!"

"From the woman one loves! Great heavens! are you speaking of Cécile? What! when you married Cécile, you did not love her!"

"Never!" said he, with emphasis. Then he added, in a lower tone, very rapidly: "Oh! I did not deceive her; God is my witness! I deceived only myself—and you!"

At this the whole truth became clear to me. I rose in utter distraction. A cry escaped me: "Ah, unhappy man, what have you done?"

"I have done," said he, "what you will understand better than any one else. I sacrificed myself! O madame, I did not seek this conversation; I would have shunned it rather, for doubtless it will separate us for ever. So be it! But since we have commenced it, my heart must unburden itself at last! You must know all. Let me finish, I beg of you! I am speaking to you, you see, with profound respect. Well! will you recall the past! When Roger revealed to me his fatal passion for you, when I understood that I must choose between you and him, that I could no longer love you without consigning him to despair—perhaps to suicide—I sacrificed myself. And then, by a courageous effort—which I believed possible, which I believed sincere—I tried to transfer my love to that child, whom you loved, who was entirely enveloped by the reflection of your charm and your tenderness. Yes, I believed I loved her; but no, it was still you that I loved in her. And, though this word may be the last I shall pronounce before you—to-day, as then, it is you only, you of all the world, whom I love!"

I heard all this in a stupor, my eyes fixed on the darkness.

Suddenly, at the poignant thought of this lost happiness, my tears flowed in spite of myself. He leaned forward a little and saw my emotion. "You weep!" said he. "It is true, then, is it possible? You also—you loved me?—you have suffered like me? Great God, do not tell me so! Do not let me think it, if you do not wish to make me lose all sense of right and honour that is left me!"

My hand rested gently on his arm, and I said to him: "It is not I, monsieur, I hope, who would ever cause you to lose either reason or honour; but I loved you much—I love you still! If you are worthy to hear such an avowal from the lips of an upright woman, the next minute will show. I cannot stifle the feelings of my heart, but I can at least—and I rely upon it that you can also—raise them high enough to purify them. Do not let us separate like two feeble creatures who are afraid of becoming the miserable sport of their passions. Let us guard our mutual affection bravely, and give it a new character—make of it an almost sacred tie, uniting us both in a generous conspiracy for the sake of that which is right. You know already what task I had proposed to myself before I knew the truth. I hold to it now more than ever. Aid me loyally to accomplish it, aid me to reconquer for you the heart of your wife; I promise you to help her conquer yours. Will you? If you say yes, I esteem you so highly that I shall place my hand in yours with absolute confidence; otherwise—farewell!"

He reflected for a few seconds, then without speaking he tendered me his hand. I rose immediately, and we returned to the drawing-room. "You will send Cécile to me tomorrow," I said to him; "I wish to begin my preachings very gently. As for you, I will not tell you to be indulgent with her; you are too much so already. On the contrary, scold her; I am sure she will be pleased to be chided by you. It is indifference which alienates us women!"

He bowed, walked off a few steps, and then turning, said : "I forgot—you know I leave to-morrow with the general for a month or six weeks—an inspection in the provinces. It is extremely vexatious."

"Perhaps not," said I, "for during her temporary widowhood Cécile will necessarily be more retired ; it will be a beginning. On your side, you will have time for reflection, and on your return you will know better if you are really capable of keeping the engagement that you have just taken somewhat hastily, it seems to me, and somewhat lightly—"

"No," said he, in his gentle and resolute voice, "not lightly. I understood you at once. My life was lost ; your friendship raises it again and rescues it. What you propose to me is very lofty, very heroic, but you will carry me to it on your wings. Farewell, madame. Trust me." And he left me.

I passed a sleepless but happy night. I was satisfied with myself. I had conquered a great temptation. If ever a woman should read this, and she has ever met in her life a man whom she had wished to press to her heart for once, although she should die in doing it, she will understand me.

The next afternoon Cécile came and told me that her husband had set out that morning for Brittany. "My dear," said she, "that frigid individual astonished me. He begged me to write to him every day. Can you fancy such an idea ? I think, however, it was mere absence of mind, and that he doesn't attach any importance to it. And he is right, for I certainly shall not write him every day."

"Why not ?"

"Have I time ? But it is absurd. I will send him dispatches : 'Are you quite well ? I am ! A thousand kisses ! Cécile.' It will be quite sufficient."

"But tell me, Cécile, do you not intend to remain at home a little more during your husband's absence ?"

"Remain at home? What do you wish me to do at home? Besides, what difference does it make? Whether my husband is present or absent, seems much the same thing, so far as I can see!"

"Cécile, be serious a moment, I beg you, and let us talk this over."

"Yes, my angel."

"Don't you tire of this life a little?"

"No, my treasure!"

"Ah, well! I confess I am beginning to love you less."

She clasped me round the neck. "That is not true!"

I tried a while longer to draw her into an intimate and confidential conversation; she did not resist directly, but she constantly eluded it and escaped with some jest. I saw that my task would be more difficult than I had supposed, and that the dear child had acquired a terrible relish for her fatal manner of living. But I was still persuaded that I could, with a little perseverance, recapture this noble heart, whose essential virtues I knew so well.

She had already begun to defend herself, with rather more embarrassment, when Prince Viviano was announced, and she was evidently much relieved to have that pretext to escape me. She rose, flung a few sarcastic remarks at the prince—for she held a constant grudge against him for what she called his stupidity, that is to say, his indifference towards her—then she went out.

As I accompanied her into the antechamber, she said to me in a laughing way, "My lovely preacher, I am going to take my revenge. You reproach me, or you would like to reproach me, with my manner of life, which is a little flighty, I confess; but, if you should consult my husband, I imagine that he would prefer to leave me in my whirlwind rather than see me seated at my fireside four or five times a week with such a man as that. What do you think?"

"What! Does M. d'Éblis disapprove of my receiving the prince?"

"Not exactly, but I really believe that he is jealous even now on account of his poor friend Roger, for he cannot endure your prince. And the fact is, my dear, that the prince comes here very often; I assure you it is talked about."

"Ah, well, my dear," said I, "I will prove to you that I can profit by good advice, and I hope that you will follow my example."

"Yes, my love; I adore you!" and she ran away.

I rejoined the prince, meditating on that malicious insinuation of Cécile's. However, it only made me hasten to execute a resolution that I had already taken. For some time past the attentions of the prince had really become very frequent, and they began to annoy me. Nevertheless, his wit amused me, his language with me never failed in respect; finally, the improvement in his life had not changed since his return to Paris, and, as that improvement was in part my work, I tried to preserve it. So it could not enter into my mind to give him a humiliating dismissal; I simply desired to divest our relations of the too intimate character that he more and more studied to give to them.

In the course of our conversation, he himself furnished me with the opportunity I sought, by asking me if I would be at home that evening. "Yes," said I, laughingly, "I shall be—but not to you!"

"Why not to me?"

"Because your time is too precious, prince, for me to abuse it so far."

"You have had enough of me?"

"I have not had enough of you—but I do not wish too much," I rejoined, in the same tone. "Come, you do not intend to compromise me, do you?"

"Ah! but I beg your pardon," said he, gaily.



"Still more reason, then. I have a friendship for you, but I shall really be obliged to receive you less frequently." As I said this, I was surprised at the serious expression that his features suddenly assumed.

"I must explain, then," said he. "I wished to wait a little time longer; but I see that the moment is come for it. It is true that I have multiplied my visits unscrupulously, because my feelings for you justified the indiscretion in my eyes. I love you, madame, and my love does not date from yesterday. Pardon me! I know perfectly to whom I am speaking. I know that such an avowal addressed to such a woman as you has no two interpretations possible; for one to offer his heart to you is to offer you his name. You have made yourself mistress of my life; by your goodness you have made a new man of me—a better man. Will you be kind enough, charitable enough, to accomplish your work? May I hope that one day you will deign to be my wife?"

This unexpected proposal caused me more surprise and annoyance than uneasiness. Wishing to spare the prince the mortification of a too abrupt and too absolute a refusal, I said to him, hesitating a little, that I was sincerely grateful for so marked an evidence of esteem, but that he took me quite by surprise; that I could not complain of a proposal so unexpected, since I had in a measure provoked it in spite of myself, but that my bereavement was still too recent to permit me even to discuss it. I begged him, therefore, to speak of it to me no more.

While accepting the most extended delay that I could desire to impose upon him, he earnestly insisted upon obtaining a less vague answer—a word of hope. Honesty preventing me from giving him this satisfaction, I was under the necessity of emphasising my refusal. I said plainly to him, although with consideration and courtesy, that I had taken a firm

resolution to devote myself entirely to my daughter, and never to marry again.

There was doubtless some chagrin, but there was, above all, what seemed to me spite, anger, and wounded pride, in the countenance and accent of the prince, after I had made him this formal declaration. I again perceived in him, under the refined manner of the man of the world, the spoiled child whose caprices had always been laws, and who must have formerly broken the playthings that had been refused him. His pale and almost sallow countenance was painfully contracted; his eyelids opened and closed spasmodically, and his eyes shot out an evil light at me. I was going to make of him, he said to me, in broken accents, a despairing man—a profligate! I was going to plunge him again into the slough which he had come out of to please me! At my age I could not seriously entertain the thought of remaining a widow; doubtless I was waiting for a better match. I would, perhaps, regret him one day; I would repent having refused him my hand. . One became wicked when one was unhappy; and much more of the same sort, which seemed to me in deplorable taste. I observed with sadness that where vice has been there always remains a depth of mirc. I was soon to appreciate this more fully.

Finally, he felt that he was insulting me, or rather that he was losing his own self-respect. He recollected himself, apologised, tried to turn his ravings into jest, and left me on good enough terms, begging me, in spite of all, to preserve my friendship for him. I promised it to him, but promised myself the contrary. For I had never had much confidence in him, and I no longer had any at all.

Five or six days passed. Surprised not to see Cécile again, for she was not accustomed to let so long an interval elapse between her visits, I decided to go to her house, without much hope of meeting her, for she lunched every day with

some one or other. However, I found her, but it was in the company of Prince Viviane, who was seated opposite her at the fireside. On seeing him there, I could not resist a painful emotion—an oppression of the heart. I knew that until that time the prince had never set foot in Cécile's house, and that she had even bitterly complained of it. This change of habit annoyed me, and my annoyance was not lessened when I learned by some allusions that escaped them, that this visit had been preceded by another a few days before, and, further, they were to meet the same evening at Madame Godfrey's, where they both were to dine. It was impossible for me not to establish a connection in my thoughts between these unusual circumstances and the equivocal, almost menacing words which the prince had uttered a few days previously. He knew of my sisterly affection for Cécile; had he formed a project of at least disturbing me by transferring to my best friend the attentions which I no longer desired, and avenging himself upon her for my disdain? However unworthy and despicable such a design might be, I was not so ignorant of the world as to be unaware that the wounded pride of a libertine was capable of conceiving it. This man, it is true, in offering to marry me, had seemed to give token of some honest and serious feeling; but it was because he had found me beautiful, and had seen no other means of becoming master of my person.

I waited impatiently till he should go. Hardly was I alone with Cécile when I fell on my knees before her, and, kissing her hands, I said, "Let me speak to you—will you?"

"Speak, golden mouth! but speak quickly, for I must dress. You know I do not dine at home."

"Will you give me an immense pleasure, my dear? Do not dress; send a word of regret to this Madame Godfrey, who is not thought well of, by-the-way, and come and dine with your old, old friend."

"Ah, we are still at it!" said Cécile, laughing, but a little

awkwardly. "Well, then, let us exhaust the subject. I wish to do so very much. Upon my honour, what do you reproach me with? Do I misconduct myself? Come, do you believe that? No, you do not believe it; you know that I am simply what I have always been—a little creature who has quicksilver in her veins, who loves movement, excitement, gaiety, compliments, and dancing—all the *tra la la* of life; but, in fine, an upright little creature who does no wrong—who is devoted to her friends and faithful to her husband! What more do you want?"

"My dear little one, I do not blame you for loving pleasure; I blame you for loving only that. You had formerly—allow me to remind you—a more serious and true conception of life; in our girlish conversations we imagined something better than this endless dissipation, and this kind of intoxication in which you so strangely delight. We used to give a place, a great place, in our future existence to more intimate, more select, more worthy pleasures. Good heavens! you do nothing wrong, to be sure, but you do nothing good. For example, you do nothing to elevate your tastes, your sentiments, your ideas; you develop yourself only in the direction of your weaknesses. Then, too, believe me, this continual lightness of conduct, of attitude, of language, is not without danger in the long-run; for all serious things in this world are bound together somehow. Honesty and virtue are grave things which need to rest upon a serious foundation of existence. They are scattered in the whirl and frivolity of a wholly exterior life. Little by little they lose the consistency and solidity which are essential to them, and without which they no longer have force enough to rule our passions. Thus a woman finds herself suddenly unarmed before the smallest temptation, the least excitement. In short, I beg you, my dear child, to stop where you are in this downward course, and let me add that the absence of

your husband furnishes you with a very natural excuse, and that it even imposes it upon you as a duty!"

She listened to me, alas! in a kind of impatient abstraction, tapping the carpet with her little foot. "Well, be it so!" she rejoined, "it is possible; perhaps there is some truth in your sermon; I will think of it; but, as for this evening, I have formally promised Madame Godfrey—and I shall go."

"No, I beg of you!"

"But, really, why this insistence? Why do you so particularly desire that I should not go to Madame Godfrey's this evening? Be frank; it is on account of Prince Viviane, whom you were displeased to find with me!"

"Very likely," said I.

"Ah! that is pleasant! You reserve him exclusively for yourself, it appears!"

"I reserve him for myself so little that I have refused his heart and hand which he wished to offer me, one with the other, five days ago. If I betray this secret, it is because I feel myself almost forced to it to put you on your guard against a man whom I believe to be infinitely dangerous. I shall be at ease now; for, supposing that he intends to make love to you—as he seems disposed to do—you will be edified as to the sincerity of the sentiments he will express for you. I know your delicacy and pride, and I know what reception a rejected lover who dares to ask consolation from you may hope for."

She stood up in front of me, her eyes flashing. "I do not believe you," she cried—"I do not believe a word that you have just said! Confess the truth: you are jealous—that is it!"

"Cécile, is it you who are speaking?"

"Yes, it is I; and, I tell you, you are jealous! What! for two years or more you have been accustomed to seeing

the prince tête-à-tête every day, or nearly every day—and that is quite natural—that is perfectly proper—but, so soon as he happens to come to see me twice, quite by chance, everything is wrong! Come, you are jealous! Well, never mind, don't fret, I will return you your prince! I'm sure I don't want him."

"Ah! my poor child, where have you learned that tone? Do you know, you offend me?"

"Indeed! but it is you who have offended me for the last hour, and you are always doing so, by treating me like an unreasoning child, and a woman devoid of honour! Never mind, though; good-evening. Let me go and dress!"

My eyes, half wild with grief and astonishment, sought hers, but in vain; she shunned my look. I took a few steps towards the door. "Charlotte!" said she, "give me your hand!"

"No," said I, "you are not worthy of it." And I went out.

I returned home with a sore heart. In the first grief which followed this scene, it seemed to me that everything was leaving me, that everything was giving way. I was losing the dearest friendship of my life; at the same time I was losing the great interest which bound me to life again, and upon which I had counted to occupy and soothe my heart. I saw myself prevented by Cécile's obstinate backwardness from keeping the compact I had made with her husband. Henceforth, how could I ask his good-will and assistance towards a reconciliation to which his wife was hostile? How should I reveal the sad truth to him? How could I even look on him again?

On reflection, however, my agitation became a little calmer. I assured myself that it was impossible Cécile could be so changed and hardened as to have become an absolutely different person from herself. I remembered that she had

formerly had these fits of ill-temper and anger with me, that she had always been sorry for them, and that her excellent heart had quickly got the better of them. I hoped that it would be the same in this instance, and that she would come to me the next day ashamed and repentant.

But I was not destined to pass the next day in Paris. Very early in the morning I received a letter from Madame Hémery, Madame de Louvercy's housekeeper, announcing that my mother-in-law was seriously ill; she wished to see me, and also her granddaughter. I forgot every other anxiety, and set out immediately with my daughter for Louvercy.

My mother-in-law was suffering from a violent bronchial attack, which had at first rather alarmed her physician. But the disease was quickly subdued, and a week after our arrival she was entirely out of danger. I greatly desired to return to Paris, but I was unable to do so. It was already December, and I was under a promise to take my daughter each year to her grandmother's for the Christmas and New Year's holidays; as we were now so near them, I had no excuse for not prolonging my visit till then.

At this time there came a letter from Cécile which removed a part of my fears, but still left very many and very grave ones. Here is the letter, which later on was destined to play an important part in a most unhappy event:

"My well-beloved Charlotte, I hastened to you on Monday like a poor, crazy person. The news of your departure has overwhelmed me. I had to return home with this mountain resting on my heart. Oh, my darling, tell me we are not enemies! When you refused me your hand the other evening, it seemed to me that my good angel had abandoned me, and that I was falling, I knew not where. Oh, my dear Charlotte, I do not believe a word of those unworthy things I said to you. I beg your forgiveness for them on my knees.

You were a thousand times right to blame my miserable mode of life; but don't you see that the bottom of it all is that I am unhappy, frightfully unhappy! My husband is an excellent man, full of merit and honour; but he has one terrible failing—he does not love me! I have felt it for a long time, almost since the first day, and it is killing me! He does not ill-treat me. He is indulgent to me, but it is an indulgence that freezes me. He does not love me! Ah, well! What would you have a woman do who perceives that? There is but one remedy—not to think, not to reflect, to fasten bells on one's head and feet, and divert one's self with the noise! And yet that does not always suffice; there are moments when my heart fails me, when I almost lose my head, when I feel that I am on the point of some desperate act—of a last and irreparable folly! You see that I have need of your love! As for me, I adore you.

“CÉCILE.”

This letter frightened me, not only by the disordered state of mind which it evinced, but above all by the strange insistence with which Cécile, for the first time, complained of her husband's behaviour, of which, until then, she had seemed so little sensible. One would have thought that she had just noticed it for the first time, as if she had taxed her wits to find a grievance in order to create or prepare an excuse.

I answered her very fully the same day. I tried to calm her excitement by assuring her, in the first place, that my tender friendship for her, though cooled for an instant, remained no less entire and unalterable on that account; then I tried to prove to her that her husband sinned towards her only by excess of complacency; that she could not seriously reproach him for not having given up his work, his career, his future, to take part in all his wife's pleasures; that she herself would have been the first to blame him for it, and to



suffer for it in her pride; that, in truth, he had more right to complain of her want of affection, since he had made so many sacrifices for her, and she had made none for him; that perhaps—that certainly, even—in the secrecy of his heart, M. d'Éblis reproached her as she did him; that it depended entirely upon her to break the ice which had formed between them, and that I had reason to believe that the least effort on her part towards a reconciliation with her husband would be met with gratitude and with effusion; that, besides, I had determined to destroy this sad misunderstanding between them, and, if she would only aid me a little, the new year that was about to commence would see happiness reseated at her fireside at the same time that she herself took her station there. I reminded her that her husband before his departure had asked her to write him almost every day, and I begged her to respond less lightly than she had done to this request, which certainly was not a mark of indifference.

A little reassured after having sent this letter, I was still more so in receiving, a few days later, a note from Cécile, rather short, but in which she seemed to display a good deal of steadiness and wisdom. She thanked me very tenderly. She said that I was right, and it was she who had spoiled her happiness; but she had determined to repair her fault; she awaited her husband's return, impatient to begin her reformation at once; but she awaited him also with some timidity, because her deep attachment to him had always been alloyed with a little fear.

Spite of its being in singular contrast with the tone of her preceding letter, this language seemed natural and sincere to me; and, knowing that M. d'Éblis was to reach Paris the following week, I felt myself freed from all the unhappy apprehensions which I had brought to Louvercy.

On the evening of December 17th Madame de Louvercy, my daughter, and I, had finished dinner, when we thought

we heard a sound of bells and the cracking of a whip in the direction of the avenue. All of us listened with surprise, for we were living in great retirement; except the curé and the doctor, who came to us in the daytime, we received no one, and were still further from expecting a visit from a stranger, as the weather was extremely severe. It was freezing hard, and since the night before there had fallen a great quantity of snow, which buried us in our woods and separated us from the rest of the world. One's curiosity is easily aroused in the country. My daughter ran to the window. "It is a carriage," said she; "I see the lamps; they are coming—they are coming!" I got up also; I rubbed the frost off a pane with my handkerchief, and saw the dark form of a carriage ploughing through the snow-drifts and advancing slowly towards the château, skirting the frozen pond. Save the feeble tinkling of the bells nothing was heard, the wheels sliding rather than rolling over the thick white carpet which covered the ground.

My mother-in-law and I were asking each other who it could be, when the door opened suddenly, and we could not repress a cry of astonishment at seeing Cécile enter. She came towards us with her abrupt and rapid step, embraced her aunt, then me, and said to us with a nervous laugh: "I wanted to give you a surprise. My husband writes that he is unable to return for a week; the idea occurred to me of passing the week with you—and here I am, only I was delayed on the road by this snow. We were more than three hours coming from the station; I am chilled, and shivering." Indeed, she was shaking in all her limbs; I was struck at the same time with the pallor and the change in her features, which I attributed to the cold she had endured and the languor which succeeded it.

While her aunt was gently reproving her folly, and thanking her for her thoughtful attention in the same breath, I

made her sit down before the fire; then I gave orders for some dinner to be brought her. But she would take nothing; she had dined at Mantes, she told us. She began with feverish volubility to relate the incidents of her journey, the trouble she had had to find a carriage at the station, and the fright of her maid in the middle of the woods so full of snow. At times she interrupted herself, and sat still with her eyes fixed straight before her. Then she would hastily resume her narrative and her fits of childish laughter. Towards nine o'clock, Madame de Louvercy, who was still indisposed, begged us to excuse her, and retired to her room. "You will do well," I said to Cécile, "to go to bed also; you look completely tired out; we can talk to-morrow as much as we like." "No, no," she answered, "I am all right now. Let us go to your room. We can chat there better than here."

My room was the same one that I had occupied six years before during my first visit at Louvercy, in the northern tower of the château. I had preferred it to any other on account of the memories it recalled to my mind. Besides, it adjoined that which my grandmother had occupied, and which was now my daughter's. We went thither, Cécile and I, preceded by Madame Hémery, the housekeeper, who lighted us up. She stirred the fire and left us. Directly she had gone, Cécile threw her hat on the bed and hastened to shut the double door which was half open. Then coming towards me with an automatic step, she fixed her eyes on mine with a terribly wild expression, placed her hands on my shoulders, and said in a low and dull tone which I shall never forget: "Charlotte—I am undone!"

A chill like death froze my veins. "My God!" I exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, "what are you saying to me?"

"The truth," she replied in the same tone; "I am ruined!"

I remained for some seconds utterly overwhelmed—motion-

less, speechless; then with an inquiring look, "The prince?" I asked.

She bowed her head with a gesture of gloomy acquiescence.

"You are his mistress?" I asked again, in a lower tone.

"I have been! Yes, yesterday, on leaving the ball. How? Why? I know not!—I yielded—without reason, without passion, without excuse, like a good-for-nothing."

I saw that she was fainting. I supported her and helped her to reach a sofa, on to which she dropped. I fell on my knees before her, and holding my head in my hands, I wept bitterly. Very soon I felt her fingers stroking my hair.

"Dear, good Charlotte," she murmured, "you are weeping for me! Ah, I was an upright woman till then, I swear to you! And to think I can never be one again—never; that I have that stain on my forehead, that shame in my heart, for the rest of my life! Oh! is it true? Is it possible? Great God, what an awakening!—Ah, if one only knew—if one only knew!"

"Oh, my poor, poor, child!" said I, kissing her hands.

She drew them from me. "No! no!" she exclaimed, "I entreat you. I am no longer worthy; I am dishonoured and detestable!—Ah, my God, have pity! Let me go mad, I pray thee!" and she clasped her uplifted hands convulsively.

"And now," cried she, suddenly starting up, "what am I to do? I lied to you just now, when I told you that my husband would not be back for a week; he returns to-morrow!—to-morrow, do you hear? That is why I fled—why I came to cast myself on you, to ask you what I am to do. I cannot see him again—I cannot! He was so good to me—so good—and he is so honourable himself!"

"Dearest, indeed you must see him again," I said through my tears.

"How can I? It is impossible, unless I confess all to him! Yes, I would like to tell him all; whatever comes of

it, whether he kills me or pardons me, I shall be released, shall I not? Am I not right? I ought to confess—you advise me to?”

I made no reply. “Then,” said she, rising up, “I have only to kill myself!”

I forced her back gently and sat down beside her. “Compose yourself, let us be calm, my Cécile, I pray you. Let me think—let me reflect. This is all so sudden, so perplexing. Let us see: you ask me if you ought to confess your fault to your husband. Good God, I hardly dare restrain you, for surely it is a good impulse; and yet I do not truly think it would be wise. In the first place, this is an offence that men seldom pardon; and then your husband would seek vengeance. You would name no one, I know very well; but he would find out; it would be very difficult to keep the truth from him; and you foresee what would happen then. Indeed, dearest, even supposing this danger averted, even supposing he pardons you, I think that confession of your fault would risk and even surely forfeit the little happiness that you two can still hope for.”

“And what happiness, great God, do you think I can hope for or can give him with the secret of this sin between us?”

“You alone know of this fault, and you, only, will suffer for it. It seems to me that sharing your grief and shame with your husband almost aggravates them, and that keeping all their bitterness to yourself is at least some slight expiation.”

“I could not,” she whispered, shaking her head wearily.

Her beautiful hair fell in disordered masses over her shoulders, and half covered her forehead and her face; her arms hung inert at her sides; her dry eyes were fixed on vacancy with a frightful stare. She was such a heart-rending-picture of absolute despair, that anything which would raise her courage seemed to me justifiable. “Dearest,” I

said to her, holding her tightly against my heart, "you thought you were not loved; that is what ruined you. I would not too much extenuate your fault, which is very great, but you are not without excuse; at least you thought you were not."

"Excuse," said she, bitterly; "I have not the shadow of one!"

"Reflect; you wrote me not long ago that it was the indifference, the neglect of your husband, that had driven you into this giddy and dissipated life. Reflect!"

"I lied," she said, in a dull tone; "you know it very well. It was I who disheartened my husband; it was I who neglected him, who preferred my senseless pleasures to his affection, to happiness, and honour! That is the truth! You yourself predicted whither it would all lead me. No, I have no excuse, not one."

"Well, in spite of all, nothing is hopeless. Come, shall I tell you what I would do myself if I were at once erring and repentant as you are? Shall I tell you to what I would cling, to what sentiment, to what hope?"

"Tell me!"

"Listen: I would spend the rest of my life in effacing my fault by conduct totally the reverse of that which had rendered me so blameworthy and so wretched. I would shut myself up in my duty as in a cloister, win the love and blessing of him whom I had had the misery of outraging in a moment of aberration, endure every privation to please him, exist only for him, consecrate and devote myself to him utterly—do for him in fact what a nun does for God. And then, believe me, a day would come when I should feel almost consoled and forgiven!"

Her eyes glistened; she embraced me. "I believe you will save me," she said. "Yes, that seems possible to me. Only, I cannot think any more; my poor head is no longer

capable of it. Then you truly believe that I may see him again?"

"Without any doubt, and it is your duty to do so."

She looked at me with the air of a frightened child, adding, "And kiss him?" I bowed assent.

"I must leave for Paris to-morrow morning then," she rejoined, "for he arrives at four o'clock."

"Yes, you must, dearest. It is all-important that you should be there at the moment of his return. I will see you off by the nine-o'clock train."

It was arranged thus: We were to invent a telegram from M. d'Éblis to explain this unceremonious departure to Madame de Louvercy. I insisted on conducting Cécile to her room; I helped her undress, and did not leave her till I saw her in bed. Worn out by such continued excitement, she seemed to me calmer and almost ready to go to sleep. I embraced her a last time, and went myself to seek some moments' repose, which, however, I did not find.

Next day, a little before seven o'clock—it was hardly daylight—I rose and proceeded to Cécile's room. I knocked at the door, but there was no response. I entered. Two candles were flickering on the mantelpiece. I went up to the bed; it was empty. Greatly astonished, I cast a rapid glance around me. All the clothes which she wore the evening before, her dress, her fur cloak, her hat, were scattered about on the furniture where we had laid them. In a corner of the room, her travelling-trunk was open and the trays in disorder. I had noticed the preceding evening, not without some surprise, a light ball costume of mauve silk, and Cécile had told me that Julie, her maid, had stupidly put it into the trunk by mistake. This dress was no longer there. I felt a sort of vague terror, a semi-stupor. I was about to ring, to call, when my eye was attracted by a letter placed conspicuously on the chimney-piece, between

the two lighted candles. I seized it; it was addressed to me, and I recognised Cécile's handwriting. I opened it, and this is what I read:

"My well-beloved Charlotte, really I can never see him again. In spite of my sin, I am still too honest a woman for that. I am going to die, my poor dearie. Forgive me the grief I cause you. I believe God, in spite of everything, will receive me kindly, for he knows what I suffer. I love life, oh! so much; but I can no longer live, you see!

"I thought it all over yesterday evening coming from the station to the château. All along the road, looking at that deep snow covering the entire country, I kept thinking to myself that I would like to lie down in it and sleep for ever. This is the death I have chosen. I have read somewhere that one does not suffer much; that when the first shock is over one sleeps quietly. I hope that it will be thus with me.

"You know where you will find me, dearest. Do you remember my saying to you one day that I should like to be buried there? I am afraid that would not be possible; but I want at least to die there. It was there that he told me he loved me—that he asked me if I would be his wife. Alas! yes; I was very willing, for I loved him so well, and I was so proud of his love—the love I have not known how to preserve!

"Tell him everything. Tell him of my sin—my dishonour; but tell him also of my repentance, will you not?

"You are the one he ought to have loved; he ought to have chosen you; I always thought so. You, only, were worthy of him. I wish he may open his eyes now; it is my last wish. You are both of you free—and, then, if you owe your happiness to me, you will have more pity—you will both more readily forgive your poor little dead

"CÉCILE."



This letter has since been very often wet with my tears, but it was not so then. I was wild. I had no longer thought, nor voice, nor tears. All at once, the idea that every moment lost would be irrepairable roused me from my stupor. I ran to my room; I called one of my servants, Jean, my husband's old soldier, who had remained in my service, and who possessed my fullest confidence. I told him briefly that I had something to do in the park, and that I wanted him to accompany me. He was evidently struck with the change in my voice and the agitation of my features; but he asked no questions. I got myself ready; he was ready himself in a moment, and we went out of the château by the door leading to the stables, so as not to attract attention.

I was obliged to confide to this man all that I could tell him of the frightful truth. On the way I gave him an explanation which I had hastily prepared. Madame d'Éblis, I said, had retired the night before in a high state of fever, arising from the fatigue of her journey through the snow; in her wandering she had spoken to me of strange things, as if in her sleep: that her head was on fire, that she wanted to go out—to go into the park, to sleep in the snow. Unhappily I had attached no importance to these feverish words, especially as I saw her sink into a sound sleep; but this morning, when I went to see how she was, I did not find her in her room. I was sure that she was not in the château; and other indications made me fear that her fever had increased during the night, and that in a fit of delirium she had attempted to carry out her sinister dreams. We would go first to look for her footsteps in the retired part of the park called the Hermitage. I supposed that in her wanderings she must have gone this way in spite of herself, as this Hermitage had always been her favourite walk. Finally, I had warned no one but him, because I wished to spare Madame de Louvercy my fears so long as a ray of hope remained.

Jean at once had an idea which had not occurred to me ; he turned quickly as far as the lodge, and sent the gate-keeper for the family physician. Then we resumed our search, which the depth of the snow rendered very slow and difficult. Several roads which intersect in the park lead from the château to the Hermitage. We took the shortest. The surface of the snow was uniform and undisturbed. A faint hope animated my heart. But, at the turning of this first avenue, Jean, who was in advance, stopped suddenly and uttered an exclamation. I ran up, and, with inexpressible anguish, saw the repeated imprints of two little feet, of two narrow and dainty boots, which alone marred the uniformity of the white plain. We looked at each other sadly. "Let us hurry," I said, in a low voice, and we hastened our march still more. For a long time, alas ! we followed these footsteps amid the startling stillness of the woods, under the gray, gloomy, and lowering sky of that mournful winter morning. They led us almost to the gateway of the park, then they turned abruptly and lost themselves in the path which runs through the underwood and comes out within a few steps of the Hermitage.

"Madame is right," said Jean to me, in a whisper ; "she is there." He saw that I stopped and was about to swoon ; he begged me to lean on his arm. But that was impossible, the path being too narrow for us both. I passed before him and advanced. Yes, she was really there !

I have before described in these pages what this Hermitage glade was—its singular and poetic solitude, its groups of aged trees thinly scattered about, its little circular fountain, and its air of profound retreat ; and it was there I found her. At the end of the path, my first look beheld her. Still she could scarcely be seen. She was dressed in her light dress and her laces, her head resting against one of the tall beech-trees which shade the fountain. A little more

snow had fallen in the night, and had covered her as though with a kind of gauze. I remember also that from time to time light flakes fell from the branches above her head, and alighted softly upon her.

I ran forward—"Cécile! Cécile!" I knelt and clasped her hand, colder than the snow itself. Nothing! Her heart beat no longer. Her poor face was almost blue. She was dead! Ah! poor, dear child! It was then that I found my tears.

And yet I could not believe it; in spite of the sad affirmation of my companion, I still hoped. I remembered that there were some charcoal-burners' huts a short distance off, on the skirts of the wood and the park. I told Jean to try and carry her there; we might perhaps warm her—bring her back to life. The noble fellow, who was himself weeping like a child, raised her rigid form in his arms, and we directed our steps, I following him, towards these huts! What a march! What a scene! This desolate landscape—this lovely dead woman, in festive attire! She had thus arrayed herself, I have always thought, from a feeling of strange coquetry, to let her death harmonise with her life, and also, doubtless, that our last impression of her should remain more touching, more relenting, and worthier of pity.

While the people of the hut pressed with me around her, I asked Jean to run to the château and bring the doctor, who most likely had arrived by that time. But why should I dwell on these sorrowful details? The doctor came only to confirm the terrible truth. Two hours later they bore her to the château. I repeated to my mother-in-law the explanation I had given to Jean, avoiding all idea of suicide: Cécile had had a fit of fever and delirium; she had gone out in her frenzy in the middle of the night; the cold had seized on her and killed her. The feverish state in which she had evidently been on the evening before lent a convincing aspect of truth to this explanation.

At noon a telegram<sup>4</sup> was sent to M. d'Éblis, summoning him in all haste; it informed him that his wife was very ill. He arrived in the evening. Madame de Louvercy and I received him, and as soon as he saw us he understood that all was over. He desired to be left alone with the poor body, and for a long time we heard him sobbing bitterly.

The next day but one Cécile was laid to rest in the little churchyard of Louvercy, close to that grave in which she had one day buried herself alive.

M. d'Éblis remained with us the remainder of the week. We saw very little of him. He kept himself shut up in his room most of the time, or<sup>5</sup> took long, solitary walks in the park. He was deeply absorbed, very gloomy, and very silent. He asked me no questions. He appeared to accept without hesitation, without a shadow of incredulity, the story I had invented to explain his wife's death, and which I had elaborated for him with such details as were fittest to make it appear plausible to him.

A month later, a few days after I had gone back to Paris, towards the middle of January, he came to see me for the first time since my return. After a few words of indifferent and embarrassed conversation, he rose, came towards me, and, placing his finger on my hand, said, "Tell me, madame, why did she kill herself?"

This question took me completely by surprise, yet I was able to avoid confusion in my reply: "What!—but Cécile did not kill herself!"

"You are concealing it from me," he said, "you conceal it from every one; but I am certain that she killed herself!"

"You must be better informed than I, then," I said, "but that is impossible; I was there, and you were not."

"Pardon me," replied he; "but I know that all the details which you gave me concerning the circumstances which pre-

ceded this misfortune are imaginary.\* Thus, you strangely exaggerated the feverish state in which you left Cécile the night before. Julie, her maid, entered the room once after you had retired, and found her sad and preoccupied, but very calm. Hearing a noise, she went in a second time, a little after midnight. Cécile was up and had put on her wrapper; she told this girl that she was well, but that, being unable to sleep, she was going to write to kill time till she grew drowsy; she seemed to have been weeping, she was very pale, but thoroughly mistress of her reason, her will, and her language—no appearance of that delirium which, according to you, drove her to an act of madness. You have deceived me, clearly. Oh! you have excellent reasons for it, I am sure; but she killed herself. Why? Can you tell me?"

"Once more," replied I, with as much firmness as I could muster, "I know nothing of what you are speaking about."

"So, you will not—you cannot tell me the reason of her suicide?"

"If she committed suicide, I know not the cause."

"You are unused to lying, poor woman. Very well, pardon me. I do not wish to press you further. Besides, I know enough already. She killed herself the night before my return—before seeing me again—so as not to see me again. If it was thus, she did well."

How can I tell what was passing in my mind, my heart, my conscience, during this terrible questioning? I had never had a thought of abusing Cécile's last feverish words by betraying the secret of her sin; but, since her husband had divined this secret in spite of me, in spite of my sincerest efforts to keep it from him, what ought I to do? I absolutely could not bring myself to betray and dishonour her who had confided in me. I said to myself, too, that I ought, by every means in my power, to spare M. d'Éblis the bitterness, the degradation, the acute sense of one of those outrages which

are so insupportable to a man's honour. I preferred to tear his heart with a wholesome wound rather than humiliate him, to add to its grief, perhaps, but at least to give it no shame. Moreover, if I let him believe in Cécile's sin, he could not fail to make an active search for her seducer, to discover him, to engage him in a mortal quarrel—

"Well, monsieur," I said, resolutely, "you force me to it. Yes, she killed herself. Why? I think I do in truth know, and you shall know also."

I opened my little boudoir writing-table and took out the letter which Cécile had sent me from Paris, after our short-lived quarrel, and a very few days before the fatal event. In this letter—which I have transcribed entire several pages back—she endeavoured, it will be remembered, to excuse her remissness by that of her husband; she complained in the strongest terms of not being loved by him. With great apparent sincerity—which was, however, only apparent, as she soon after confessed to me—she told me she was very unhappy, tired of life and of being neglected, and ended with this cruelly equivocal phrase: "There are moments when my heart fails me, when my head is utterly lost, when I feel that I am ready for something desperate, some final and irreparable madness!"

I held out the letter to M. d'Éblis; he looked at the date, then read it, and, while he did so, his countenance writhed so that I almost repented of what I had done. When he came to the end, his arms fell at his sides, and, raising his deeply troubled and hollow eyes towards me, he murmured, "My God, is this possible!"

I dried my wet cheeks without replying.

He read that unhappy letter over again. Anxious that no doubt should recur to his mind I riveted his conviction by telling him that Cécile had spent the evening preceding the catastrophe reiterating to me that she was at the end of her

strength; that she had fled from Paris, the eve of his return, because she could not endure the thought of recommencing life with him under the burden of his alienation and aversion. I added that I had exhausted every argument and endearment to calm her desperation, and that I had believed too fully in my success, since the misfortune had happened, after all.

"Then," cried he, in a choked voice, "it is I who have killed her!" He sank into a chair and remained for a long time with his face hidden in his hands, his tears trickling through his fingers. I suffered horribly in witnessing this; but, having to choose between two evils, I felt convinced that I had spared him the worst.

It was evening, and late. M. d'Éblis recovered a little from his first emotion, rose, thanked me in a gentle and affectionate tone for telling him the truth, however overwhelming it was to him, and left me.

It was two months ago to-day that this passed between us. The night that followed—every day and every night since—I asked myself if its consequences would not be what I had in no wise foreseen, and, I confess, still less desired. I am going to explain myself here with utter sincerity. The first impression that Cécile's death made upon me was free from all personal after-thought; it was a blow which prostrated me and plunged me into a kind of dull despair. But I should not be believed if I dared to say that, when time had begun to exert its softening influence upon me, the thought that my union with M. d'Éblis had become possible, never occurred to my mind. Cécile's last letter, her final adieu, were sufficient to recall it to me. We were both free, both entirely innocent of the sorrowful cause of our freedom. I did not feel in my own conscience, I could not imagine in his, any obstacle which could henceforth arise between us and separate two hearts which had been so long bound together by deep and mutual affection.

And still, since the day when I showed Cécile's letter to M. d'Éblis, to remove his suspicions, and when he came to *believe himself* the guilty cause of her suicide, I have been asking myself if I have not awakened in the conscience of this honourable man scruples of which I may become the victim. Has not his generous and sensitive soul, through my pious falsehood, felt the duty of expiation and, in some sort, of reparation towards her who is no more? \*

Surely I cannot desire that! But, unhappily, many indications lead me to believe it—the extreme reserve of M. d'Éblis towards me, his rare visits, his enduring and even increasing anguish.

This, then, is the truly solemn, truly heavy trial which I am undergoing, or which menaces me. And it is at this momentous time that the thought has occurred to me, that I have felt the need of recalling to myself, without dissimulation or reticence, all the events of my life since the very day of my marriage. I have taken up this diary again, and confided everything to it, hoping thereby to find inspiration for the course I must pursue. Alas! in all truth I find nothing—not an act, not a sentiment, not a thought, which can fetter the freedom God has given back to me, nothing which can prevent me from accepting the happiness I dreamed of long ago, which has so long been withheld, and which finally seems vouchsafed me.

But he? Ah, I still hope that his attitude, his silence, are accounted for by the increased suffering I believed it my duty to inflict upon him, by his bereavement, which is still so fresh; by the sense of propriety which actuates him. Yes, I hope this; but what if I should be mistaken? If the falsehood that I have risked to save Cécile's honour and spare his, should rise up between us—and that alone separate us? What should I do then? I dare not think.



*Eight days later, March 20, 1878.*

Nothing more is lacking to my burden. It is complete, it is pitiless.

M. d'Éblis came this evening just as I had put my daughter to bed. He asked to see me alone. I received him in my boudoir. As he seated himself before me he said, "Madame, I am going to leave you, I am going away."

"Away!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. I have obtained the appointment of second military attaché in Russia. I leave to-morrow evening. I shall ask your permission to return to-morrow morning to bid good-bye to my little ward, whom I do not wish to awaken to-night."

I was overwhelmed. For several minutes I could not articulate an intelligible word.

Presently he resumed, in a very low voice: "We have always understood each other so well, we two, that I am sure we still understand each other now. When you revealed to me the true cause of Cécile's suicide, I understood at once, knowing you so well, the duty you imposed on me. I understood that you bade me love and respect in death her whom I misconceived in life. That is, indeed, what you wish, is it not? I obey you; but, to have strength to do so, I must go away, I must leave you."

I made no reply. He rose. "Good-bye, then," said he; "I have loved you well. I can say that I have loved you more than my honour even; for—you will think me vile—when I thought I had discovered Cécile's infidelity, and that, to silence her remorse, she had killed herself, dreadful as the thought was, my wretched heart nevertheless welcomed it with secret joy, for it released me from her, it restored me to you!"

As he was uttering these words, the unhappy man still interrogated me with a look of doubt and anguish.

I remained silent. He grasped my hand and withdrew.

But yet—let me reflect—can I let him depart? Is it

possible? Ought I? Can I? Oh, my God, tell me! I have loved him so much. O God! I do love him so much! And to let him go into exile—perhaps to death—when by a single word I can keep him for ever at my side! He will believe me if I tell him the truth; besides, I have Cécile's last note; the confession of her fault written by her own hand. She, herself, gave me permission, even begged me to deliver it to her husband. Oh, it is but just, after all; and we two have sacrificed ourselves long enough! Happiness is there, and nothing separates us from it but an exaggerated, sickly, even mad scruple! No, I *will not* let him go; I am decided.

All night long I sat up, pondering it over. All night long I saw the dear little friend of my childhood in her bed of snow, and I swore to do for her what I would have had her do for me: to protect her memory even to the end, even at the expense of my happiness, even at the cost of my life, to defend her honour at any price—to leave her, my poor little dead one, pure and spotless in the memory of all! Sleep in peace, darling. Only God and myself shall know your fault!

I have just burned her funereal letter—the sole proof. I have written to M. d'Éblis, praying him to spare me his last adieu. I shall see him no more. I am alone, alone for ever!

But you are left to me, my daughter. I write these last lines at the side of your pillow. I hope some day to put these pages in your bridal trousseau, my child; perhaps they will lead you to love your poor, romantic mother; you will learn of her, perhaps, that passion and romance are good sometimes, with God's assistance; that they elevate the heart; that they teach it higher duties, great sacrifices, the noblest joys of life. My tears fall as I tell it you; it is true; but, believe me, there are tears which the angels envy.

## THE LITTLE COUNTESS.

I:

• Du Rozel, *September 15th.*

It is nine o'clock in the evening, my dear Paul, and you have just returned from Germany. My letter is handed to you, and the post-mark at once informs you that I am absent from Paris. You shrug your shoulders and vituperate me a little, and then, when you are at last comfortably seated in the easiest of your arm-chairs, you open this letter of mine and learn that for the past five days I have been living in a mill in Lower Normandy. "A mill! What the deuce can he be doing in a mill?" You frown, your eyebrows come very close together; you lay down my letter for a minute and attempt to penetrate this mystery by the sole effort of your imagination. Suddenly your face clears; a faint smile quivers on your lips and expresses the irony of a sage, tempered by the indulgence of a friend. You have a vision of a scene in a comic opera. You see a miller's maid, all powdered and rouged, wearing a low-necked dress trimmed with gay ribbons, and ending in a full, short skirt, displaying stockings with golden clocks. In short, one of those fair miller's maids whose hearts go pit-a-pat to the accompaniment of an orchestra. But the Graces, who are constantly playing with your thoughts, sometimes deceive you; my

millers' maid resembles yours about as much as I resemble young Robin. She wears a huge linen cap, which the densest coating of flour cannot restore to its original colour; she wears a heavy woollen skirt, so coarse in material that it would even irritate the hide of an elephant. To cut the description short, my miller's maid is a miller's wife, and I am often at a loss to decide which is the woman—he or she. This being the case, it is useless for me to tell you that I am not at all desirous of knowing whether her heart goes pit-a-pat.

The truth is, that not knowing what to do with myself or how to kill time during your absence, and having no reason to hope for your return before another month had expired, I applied at the ministry for something to do. The council general of the department of —— had just expressed a wish that the ruins of a certain abbey, called the Abbaye du Rozel, should be classed among the historical monuments; and I have been appointed to inquire into the matter.

I repaired in hot haste to the chief town of this most artistic department, and made my appearance with all the solemn gravity of a man who holds in his hands the life or death of a monument dear to his country. I made numerous inquiries at the hotel, and great was my mortification to discover that not a human being seemed to know that the Abbaye du Rozel existed, or had ever existed, anywhere in that part of the country. While smarting under this disappointment, I called at the prefecture. The prefect, who, by the way, is V——, whom you know, received me with his usual grace; but to the questions which I addressed him in reference to the state of the ruins which it was now suggested to make an effort to preserve, he replied, with an absent sort of smile, that his wife, who had seen these ruins with a party of friends while she was at the sea-side, was far better able than himself to answer my inquiries.

He invited me to dinner, and, in the evening, Madame V——, after a great deal of persuasion, showed me some rather clever sketches she had made of these famous ruins. She became slightly enthusiastie as she talked of these venerable remains situated, so she declared, in a most enchanting spot, and very appropriate for picnic parties. A most supplicating and seductive look terminated her discourse. It seems to me evident that this little woman is the only person in the whole department who takes a true interest in this poor old abbey, and that the conscript fathers of the council general had expressed their wish out of pure gallantry. I must admit that it is impossible for me not to be of their opinion; the abbey pleads with such lovely eyes; it deserves to be classed among the historial monuments, and it shall be.

This being my decision, it became necessary that I should give my reasons for it, and bring forward a few facts in its support. Unfortunately, the archives and local libraries are by no means rich in traditions relating to my subject, and, after two days of conscientious search, I had discovered but two or three insignificant documents, which can be condensed into these brief lines. "The Abbaye du Rozel, in the commune du Rozel, had been inhabited from time immemorial by monks, who left it when it was destroyed."

I, therefore, determined to go, without further delay, and in person force their secret from these mysterious ruins, and if necessary use my peneil to strengthen the insufficient statements of my pen. I started, Wednesday morning, for a large market town, only two or three leagues from the abbey. A Normandy coach, complicated by a Normandy coachman, dragged me all day long, like an indolent monarch, along a road lined on either side by Normandy hedges. When night came, I had achieved twelve leagues, and my coachman had eaten twelve meals. The country is beautiful,

although somewhat uniformly rural. Under everlasting green groves lie meadows of rich though monotonous verdure, in the midst of which ruminant herds of overfed cattle. I understand my coachman's twelve meals. The idea of eating must be constantly and almost solely present to the imagination of any man who passes his life in the midst of such fertile surroundings; the mere sight of the grass gives one an appetite.

Towards evening, however, the aspect of the landscape changed. We entered upon a level plain, marshy and bare, stretching on either side of the road. The noise made by our wheels had a hollow, echoing sound. Dark reeds and tall sickly looking grasses covered, as far as the eye could see, the black waters of the marsh. I saw in the distance, through the twilight and the mist, two or three horsemen madly careering through this endless waste. I would lose sight of them occasionally among the rank herbage, and then they would suddenly reappear again, but always riding at the same wild pace. I could not conceive towards what ideal end these equestrian phantoms were flying, nor did I care to inquire, as I was rather charmed by the mystery.

The next day I continued my journey to the abbey, taking with me, in my cabriolet, a stout peasant, with hair as yellow as that of Ceres. He was a farm labourer, who had lived ever since his birth, in the immediate neighbourhood of my monument, and, having heard me making inquiries that morning, in the court-yard of the inn, he had most obligingly offered to guide me to the ruin, which was the first thing he had seen on entering the world. I had no need of a guide, but I, nevertheless, gladly accepted this fellow's offer, whose incessant chatter seemed to promise an unflagging conversation, during which I might succeed in eliciting some interesting legend; but as soon as he found himself seated by my side, the rogue became absolutely

dumb. My questions seemed—I could not tell why—to inspire him with profound distrust, almost with anger; I had evidently to deal with the geni of the ruins, the jealous guardian of their treasures. On the other hand, I had the pleasure of driving him home; this was, apparently, all he wished, and he had every reason to be satisfied with my courtesy.

After having deposited this most agreeable companion at his own door, I found myself obliged to alight from my vehicle. A flight of steps, cut in the rock, wound down the side of the plain and led me into a narrow valley, which stretches between some high, wooded slopes. A little river sleeps under the slender alders and separates two rows of meadows, velvety and soft as the lawns of a park. It is crossed by an old single-arched bridge, whose graceful form is reflected in the tranquil waters. On the right, the hills draw closer together, their green summits overlapping each other. On the left, they spread somewhat and are at last lost in the depths of a forest. The valley is thus shut in on all sides, and presents a picture whose calm, sweet freshness and seclusion are unequalled. If one could ever hope to find peace outside of one's self, this sweet asylum would surely afford it; or, at all events, would insure its semblance for a brief period.

This site sufficed to convince me of the close proximity of the abbey, which, no doubt, succeeded the hermitage. In that epoch of brutal and convulsive transition which so painfully inaugurated the modern era, what an immense need of repose and contentment must have been felt by all delicate natures and contemplative minds. I read the heart of the monk, of the poet, of the unknown spiritualist whom chance led one day, in those dark times, to these sloping hills, and who suddenly discovered the treasures of solitude which they contained. I picture to myself the joy of this weary dreamer

when he gazed on this peaceful scene. I understand it and am, in fact, not far from sharing it.

Our own times, in spite of great dissimilarity, are not without some resemblance to the early part of the middle ages. The moral disorder, the intense selfishness, the cupidity and the barbarous violence which characterise that sinister phase of our history, seem separated from us to-day, only by the distance which separates theory from practice, the plot from its execution, and the perverse soul from the criminal hand.

The ruins of the abbey are close to the forest. All that remains of the abbey itself is very little ; at the entrance of the court-yard a monumental gateway ; one wing of the building dating from the twelfth century, in which live the family of the miller with whom I reside ; the chapter-hall, remarkable for its elegant arches and some few traces of mural decoration ; and, finally, two or three cells, one of which must have served as a place of punishment, if I may judge by the solidity of the door and the bolts. All the rest has been demolished, and the fragments are to be found in the cottages round about. The church, which has almost the proportions of a cathedral, is beautifully preserved, and marvellously effective. The portal and one or two of the external pillars are alone wanting, while all the interior architecture, the beautiful ceiling, the tall columns are intact and as if erected yesterday. It looks as though an artist had presided at the work of destruction ; a pickaxe wielded by a master-hand seems to have opened two gigantic breaches at the two extremities of the church, where once stood the portal and the altar, in such a way that standing, at the entrance, one can look into the forest as through a deep triumphal arch. I was wonder-struck and charmed by this unexpected and solemn sight.

"Sir," said I to the miller, who since my arrival had



watched each step I took with that grim suspicion, so characteristic of the Norman peasants, "I am appointed to study and sketch these ruins. This work will take me several days; are you willing to spare me the trouble, fatigue, and loss of time necessitated by a daily drive from the market town to the abbey, and allow me to lodge with you for a week or two!"

The miller, a thorough-bred Norman, examined me from head to foot without replying, with the air of a man who knows that silence is golden. He calculated the worth of my purse and intellect, and finally opening his lips, besmearcd with flour, he called his wife, who appeared on the threshold of the chapter-hall, now used as a stable, and listened to my request. She in her turn examined me earnestly, but not for so long a time as her husband had done, and with the superior instinct of her sex, concluded as I had a right to expect like the *præses* in "Le Malade"—*Dignus est intrare*. The miller, as soon as he saw how things were going, raised his cap and treated me to a smile.

The good people, now that the ice was broken, did their best to make amends by their thoughtful kindness for the cautiousness of their welcome. They wished me to occupy their own room, adorned with the adventures of Telemachus; I preferred, however, as Mentor would have done, a cell of rude austerity, with its little lozenge-paned window looking on to the ruined portal of the church and beyond the forest.

Had I been a few years younger I should have keenly enjoyed this romantic installation; but I am growing gray, friend Paul, or at all events I am afraid I am, although I still try to attribute the doubtful tone of my beard to the mere playing of the light upon it when I stand in the noon-day sun. However, though my dreams are no longer the same, they still live and charm me always. My poetic sentiments are modified and I think elevated. A woman is no

longer an indispensable element in my dreams ; my heart is calmer, but I cannot, I must admit, find entire and all-sufficing pleasure in pure and arid intellectual meditation. My imagination must have play, for I was born romantic, and romantic I must die ; and all that can be expected or asked of me is that, at an age when a certain gravity of manner and conduct is essential, my romances should have no love in them.

The relics of a past age favour this incurable partiality of mine ; they help me to resuscitate the manners, passions and ideas of by-gone times, and to seek, under the varied characters of each epoch, the old enigma of life. In this cell where I now write, I invoke each night figures with jaded faces, and arrayed in coarse woollen robes ; a monk appears, sometimes kneeling in that dark corner, on the worn stones, wrapped in a happy ecstasy of faith, sometimes with his elbows on that oak shelf blackened by time, illuminating with golden aureola the parchment missals, perpetuating the works of some ancient genius, or pursuing some fleeting scientific theory until he trembles on the verge of the Black Art. Another phantom, standing near the narrow window, rivets his tearful eyes on those leafy woods which remind him of knightly hunting parties and the caparisoned palfreys of noble dames.

You may say what you please, I like the monks ; I do not mean the monks of these later times, those idle, bloated, immoral men, who delighted our fathers, but do not delight me. I love and venerate that ancient monastic society such as I imagine it, recruited amongst oppressed and vanquished races, which alone preserved, amid barbarous surroundings, a taste for study and mental cultivation, opening a refuge, and the only one possible at such an epoch, for a man, no matter how humble, with a ray of genius.

How many poets, savants and artists, how many anonymous

inventors had reason to bless, during ten centuries, these sacred asylums which preserved them from the poverty and bestial life of the tillers of the ground. The abbey gladly extended its sheltering arms to these thinkers, however poor or low-born, and aided them in the development of their various ideas ; assuring them of their daily bread and of a quiet life, proud of the reflection of their talents. Although their world was narrow, they at least exercised freely therein the faculties they received from God ; they lived happy, though they died unhonoured.

That the cloister, later on, severed itself from these noble and severe traditions, that it degenerated more and more is possible ; it yielded to the common destiny which attends all institutions which have lasted their time, and which survive their accomplished work. Anyhow, it is likely that the Gallic spirit of the emancipated people, to which was soon added the spirit of reform, has drawn more caricatures than portraits in our ancient abbeys. However that may be, even while reading Rabelais with all due respect, no man of thought can forget that, during the dark night of the middle ages, the last ray of intellectual light shines on the pale brow of the monk.

Up to the present I have not only been quite content in my solitude, but must even confess to enjoying it. It seems to me that I am a thousand leagues away from every day life, and that it is a happy break in the dull routine of an existence so monotonously full of petty cares as mine is. I enjoy my complete independence with the boyish enthusiasm of a juvenile Robinson Crusoe. I draw when I please, and the rest of the time I wander about, taking great care, however, never to pass the boundaries of this sacred valley. I sit on the parapet of the bridge and watch the water rolling below ; I explore the ruins, bury myself in the vaults, or climb the broken steps of the belfry. Sometimes I cannot

get down again, and put a most ridiculous figure, seated astride a waterspout, waiting for the miller to bring a ladder ! I lose myself at night in the forest and see the deer pass in the moonlight. Do not laugh. All this delights me, and seems like a childish dream, conceived in my ripe manhood.

Your letter, dated from Cologne, and which has been forwarded to me here, according to my instructions, has alone marred my bliss, for it is with difficulty that I can console myself for having left Paris on the very eve of your return. Bother your caprices and your indecision ! All I can do now, is to hurry through my work ; but where shall I find the historical documents I require ? I earnestly wish to rescue these ruins from oblivion and destruction. They form an ensemble of rare beauty, a priceless picture which it would be sheer vandalism to allow to perish.

And again, I love the monks, as I told you before. I wish to render to their spirits this homage of sympathy. Yes, had I lived some thousand years ago, I should certainly have sought among them the repose of the cloister while awaiting the peace of heaven. What existence would have suited me better ? With no care for this world and assured of the other, with no anxieties of heart or mind, I should have written down in peace simple legends which I should have believed ; I should have deciphered with curiosity unknown manuscripts, and discovered with tears of joy the "Iliad" or the "Æneid." I should have designed the most magnificent cathedrals, heated sundry alembics, and, who knows, perhaps invented gunpowder, though I might have done better than that.

But it is midnight ; friend, let us sleep.

P.S.—There are spectres ! I closed this letter, my friend, amid the most solemn silence, when all at once my ears were filled with strange confused noises which seemed to come from without, like the rumbling murmur of a crowd. In

great surprise I went to the window of my cell, and it is quite impossible for me to describe the precise nature of the emotion I experienced when I beheld the ruined church most resplendently lighted up ; the vast portal and the gaping windows shed rays of light upon the far off woods. It was not, it could not be a fire. Besides I saw, now and again, shadows, superhuman in height, passing up the nave, apparently performing, to some strange rhythm, an equally strange ceremony.

I hastily threw open my window ; at the same moment a loud flourish of horns resounded in the ruin and rang through the valley awakening all its echoes ; after that I saw a double file of cavaliers, carrying torches and winding their horns, come out of the church ; some of them were clad in red, and others draped in black with plumes upon their heads. This strange procession, preserving the same order and with the same wild music, took the shady lane that borders the meadows.

On reaching the little bridge, it came to a halt ; I saw the torches lifted high in the air and wildly shaken, a shower of sparks flying in every direction ; there was one wild prolonged flourish from the horns ; then, all at once the light disappeared, all noise ceased, and the valley became again buried in the profound silence and darkness of midnight. That is what I saw and heard. You who have just come from Germany, tell me, did you ever meet the black huntsman ? No ? Then go and hang yourself !

## II.

*September 16th.*

THE forest formerly attached to the abbey belongs now to a wealthy landowner of the vicinity, the Marquis de Malouet, a descendant of Nimrod, whose château seems the social centre of the country. Almost every day at this season there is a grand hunt in the forest. Yesterday, the fête ended with a supper on the grass and a return home by torch-light. I would gladly have strangled the honest miller, who gave me, in the morning, this commonplace explanation of my midnight ballad.

So the world, with all its pomps, has invaded my beloved solitude. I curse it, Paul, from the depth of my heart. I owe it, to be sure, the fantastic apparitions of last night, which charmed me greatly, but I also owe it to-day a most ridiculous adventure, at which I alone cannot laugh, as I am, unfortunately, the hero.

I was this morning disinclined for work; I sketched however until noon, but I was then obliged to leave off. My head was heavy, and I was most atrociously out of temper. I felt in the air that some disagreeable event was impending.

I returned for a moment to the mill to leave my drawing materials. I wrangled with the surprised woman in regard to some cruelly indigenous dish she had served me for my breakfast; I was cross to her two children, who fingered my pencils; and, finally, I gave the dog a kick.

Utterly dissatisfied with myself as you may well imagine,

after this cowardly behaviour I went to the forest to conceal myself as much as possible from the light of day. I walked for over an hour without being able to shake off the prophetic melancholy which weighed down my spirits. Seeing, at last, beside one of the avenues that traverse the forest, a thick bed of moss under the shade of some wide-spreading beeches, I threw myself down, with the burthen of my remorse and ill-temper, and it was not long before I slept profoundly. Why was it not the sleep of death?

I know not how long I had slept, when I was awakened suddenly by a concussion of the earth in my immediate neighbourhood. I started up and saw, within a few steps of me, a young lady on horseback. My unexpected appearance terrified the horse, which shied. The lady, who had not then seen me, soothed the animal and brought him back to the path. She struck me as pretty, slender and elegant. I caught a brief glimpse of blonde hair, eyebrows of a deeper hue, bright eyes, a bold expression, and a felt hat, with a blue feather, worn rather too much on one side.

In order that you should fully understand what follows, I must tell you that I was dressed in a tourist's blouse, considerably smeared with red ochre, and that I had, I presume, that wild startled air common to a person who is suddenly awakened from sleep, and which gives him an expression both droll and alarming. Add to this, my hair in great disorder, my untrimmed beard to which hung more than one dead leaf, and you will have no difficulty in understanding the terror that immediately seized the fair amazon when she saw me; she uttered a faint shriek, and, turning her horse quickly round, rode off at full gallop, as though for her life.

It was quite impossible for me to misunderstand the impression I had made, it was evidently far from flattering. But, fortunately, I am thirty-five, and the glances of a

woman, be they more or less kindly, are no longer sufficient to disturb the serenity of my soul. I smiled faintly as I watched her fleet retreat. At the end of the avenue—where I certainly had not made a conquest—she turned suddenly to the left and then into another one which was parallel. I had only to cross a neighbouring thicket to see her join a cavalcade, of some ten or twelve persons, who seemed to be awaiting her, and to whom she cried out, in an agonised voice while still some distance off: “Gentlemen! gentlemen! a savage! There is a savage in the forest!”

Rather interested by this opening, I comfortably installed myself behind a thick bush, my eyes and my ears equally attentive. The young lady is quickly surrounded. At first, her friends think she is jesting, but her emotion is too serious for it to be without cause. She reiterated that she had seen, clearly seen, perhaps not a savage exactly, but a man in tatters, whose ragged blouse seemed covered with blood, whose face and hands were filthily dirty, whose bushy beard was frightful to behold, and whose eyes were starting from their sockets; in short, an individual beside whom the most atrocious brigand of Salvator Rosa would look like one of Watteau’s shepherds. Never did a man’s vanity receive such a dressing! This charming person added that I had threatened her, and that, like the spectre of the forest of Lo Mans, I had thrown myself at her horse’s head.

This marvellous recital was greeted with a general and enthusiastic shout. “Let us hunt him! let us surround him, and ferret him out! hip! hip! hurrah!” And, thereupon, all these people set off at full gallop, under the guidance of that amiable young person.

I had apparently but to remain quietly in my concealment, to put the huntsmen off my track, as they went to look for me in the avenue where I had first seen the amazon. Unfortunately, I thought I should be safer in a denser thicket



close by. As I cautiously cross the road, a shout of wild joy tells me I am discovered ; at the same time, I see the whole squadron wheel round and come towards me like a torrent. There was but one reasonable thing for me to do, that was to stop, to affect the utter astonishment of an innocent pedestrian who is rudely accosted, and to disconcert my adversaries by an attitude both dignified and simple ; but, seized by a feeling of false shame, which it is easier to imagine than to explain, convinced, too, that a vigorous effort on my part would be sufficient to deliver me from this unpleasant pursuit, and save me the trouble of an explanation, I commit the ever deplorable mistake of quickening my pace, or rather, to be frank, of running away as fast as my legs would let me. I cross the road like a hare and rush into the depths of the forest, saluted by a volley of joyous shouts. My fate was sealed from this moment ; all honourable explanation became impossible ; I had so to say accepted the contest with all its chances.

I still retained, however, a certain amount of composure, and as I rushed through the bushes, I consoled myself with re-assuring reflections. Once separated from my pursuers by a good thick undergrowth impassable to cavalry, I should soon be so far in advance as to be able to laugh at their vain efforts. This final illusion vanished, however, when, arrived at an opening in the wood, I suddenly discovered that this confounded troop had divided and were awaiting me, at either end. At sight of me, a new tempest of shouts and laughter arose and the horns sounded on all sides. I was absolutely dizzy ; the forest swam round me ; I dashed into the first path which offered itself to my sight, and my flight assumed the character of a hopeless rout.

The mounted band of ladies and gentlemen followed me up with renewed ardour and stupid gaiety. I always saw the lady with the blue feather at their head, urging them on

in a most implacable manner, and I heartily wished that some accident would befall her. It was she who encouraged her abominable accomplices when for a moment I managed to hide myself from them ; she discovered me with a clairvoyance that was absolutely infernal, pointed me out with her whip and uttered a barbarous shriek of laughter when she saw me again resume my flight through the bushes—breathless, panting, desperate and ridiculous !

I ran thus for a long time, accomplishing the most unheard of feats in gymnastics, tearing through the brambles, falling into pits and sloughs, leaping ditches, rebounding about with the elasticity of a tiger, keeping up this fiendish gallop without aim or reason, and with no other hope than that the earth would open under me.

At last, and by the merest accident, for I had long ago lost all topographical notions, I suddenly perceived the ruins before me ; I crossed with one mad bound the open space which divides them from the forest, rushed through the church as if I had just been excommunicated, and arrived heated and panting before the miller's door. The miller and his wife were standing there, attracted by the noise of the cavalcade which followed me closely ; they looked at me in utter astonishment ; I vainly sought to find a word or two of explanation to give them in passing, and after the most extraordinary efforts of intelligence, I was only able to murmur stupidly : " If any one asks for me—say that I am not here ! " Then I hastily ascended the stairs leading to my cell and fell on my bed, half unconscious.

Meanwhile, Paul, my foes crowded into the court-yard of the abbey ; I heard the pawing of the horses, the voices of the cavaliers and even the sound of their heels on the stones, which told me that some of the party had dismounted, and were meditating still further investigation. I started up highly enraged, and looked for my pistols. Fortunately,

however, after a little conversation with the miller, the cavaliers retired, but not without allowing me clearly to understand that if they carried away with them a better opinion of my morals, they were somewhat perplexed by the originality of my character.

Such, my friend, is the faithful history of this miserable day which has covered me from head to foot with what every Frenchman abhors more than anything else in the world. I have at this hour the satisfaction of knowing that in a neighbouring château, among a circle of brilliant cavaliers and beautiful women, I am the subject of endless jests. I feel, moreover, that ever since my flank movement (I believe this is the phrase made use of in war to express a precipitate retreat) I have lost in my own eyes something of my dignity, besides which I cannot conceal from myself, that I am far from enjoying with my rustic hosts the same consideration as heretofore.

In this compromising situation, I held counsel with myself, and after a brief deliberation threw aside, as puerile and pusillanimous, the idea suggested by my wounded pride, that of leaving the mill at once and even turning my back on the place altogether. Finally I decided philosophically to pursue my labours and my pleasures, to show a spirit superior to circumstances, and to offer to the amazons, the cavaliers, and the millers, the edifying spectacle of a sage in adversity.

## III.

*September 20th.*

I HAVE just received your letter, my dear fellow! Who would ever have thought you could be guilty of such childishness? And this is the cause of your sudden return! a mere nothing, a hideous nightmare which, two nights in succession, causes you to hear my voice calling on you for help. Ah! bitter fruits of that detestable German cooking! Truly, Paul, you are a simpleton. And yet you sometimes say things which bring tears to my eyes. I am unable to answer you as I would; my heart is tender, but my words are cold. I could never say to any one, "I love you." There is a jealous demon who taints every word of tenderness as it passes from my lips, and gives it an inflection of irony. But, heaven be thanked, you know me.

It seems that I make you laugh, when you make me weep? Well, so much the better. Yes, my noble adventure in the forest has a continuation, and a continuation I could very well do without. All the evils with which you believed me to be threatened, have duly arrived; so be at ease.

The morrow of that disastrous day, I commenced by regaining the esteem of my hosts of the mill, by relating to them, with a good grace, all the more amusing episodes of the hunt. They nearly died with laughter. The woman, especially, opened her formidable jaws with the most frightful contortions. Never before did I behold anything so hideous as her amusement.

As a proof of his renewed confidence, the miller asked me

if I was a sportsman, and took down from above the mantle-piece a long gun with a rusty barrel, which recalled to my mind the carbine of Bas-de-Cuif. He placed it cautiously in my hands, boasting of its murderous qualities, and I acknowledged his politeness with well-feigned pleasure, never having the heart to undeceive people who think they are doing me a favour. I then moved off in the direction of the woods which cover the hill-side, carrying the venerable weapon, which seemed to me most dangerous, as though it were a lance. I seated myself among the ferns and laid the long gun down by my side; then I amused myself by throwing gravel at some young rabbits, who were playing imprudently near an instrument of warfare for the harmlessness of which I could not answer. Thanks to these precautions, no injury happened to either myself or to the game for more than an hour, during which my shooting expedition lasted.

To tell you the truth, I wished to keep myself in seclusion until the guests at the château had started off on their day's excursion, as I did not care to encounter them again. About two in the afternoon, I left my bed of mint and wild thyme, convinced that there could be no danger of any unpleasant meeting. I handed the gun back to the miller, who seemed a little amazed—perhaps at seeing me with empty bag, but more likely at seeing me alive. I then established myself opposite the portal and made an effort to finish a general view, a magnificent water-colour sketch, which is sure to enlist all the sympathies of the minister.

I was deeply absorbed in my work, when all at once I thought I heard, more distinctly than usual, that noise of horses' hoofs, which since my unfortunate adventure had incessantly rung in my ears. I turned quickly and beheld the enemy two hundred paces off. The party was in ordinary dress, and augmented by several recruits of both sexes, altogether it presented quite a formidable appearance. Although

fully prepared for this meeting, I felt none the less uneasy, and I inwardly cursed the idle wanderings of these indolent beings. However, I did not for a moment think of retreating. I had lost all taste for flight for the rest of my days.

As the cavalcade approached, I heard stifled laughs and whispers, which I understood only too well ; I will not disguise from you the fact that a grain of anger began to ferment within me, and whilst continuing my task with an air of intense absorption, bestowing every now and then an admiring look at my sketch, I paid the keenest attention to what was going on behind me. But the definitive intention of these people seemed to be to avoid further annoying me. Instead of following the path where I was at work, and which was the shortest way to the ruins, they turned slightly to the right, and rode off in silence. One person alone of the party, however, left the principal group, turned quickly round and stopped short at about ten paces from me ; although my head was bent over my sketch, I felt, by that strange intuition which we all know, that some one was looking at me. I glanced up with an air of indifference, and then lowered my eyes again almost immediately. This rapid movement sufficed to inform me that the indiscreet observer was no other than the young lady with the blue plume, the original cause of all my disgrace.

There she was, seated on her horse, with her chin in the air, and her eyes half closed, examining me from head to foot with admirable insolence. At first I considered it my duty, on account of her sex, to submit quietly to this impertinent curiosity ; but, after a while, I lost patience, and, boldly raising my eyes, fixed them upon her with polite gravity, but also with an air of determination. She coloured up, seeing which, I bowed to her. She, in her turn, bowed slightly, then rode off at full gallop, and disappeared under the roof of the old church. I remained thus master of the field, fully

enjoying my victory over this little woman who was not easily put out of countenance.

The ride in the forest lasted hardly twenty minutes, and I soon saw the whole of the brilliant party reappear. Again I pretended to be totally absorbed in my work, but this time also, a cavalier left the others and came towards me; he was a very tall man, wearing a blue frock-coat, which was buttoned in a military fashion close to his throat. He came so directly towards me and my belongings, that I could not help thinking he intended to ride over us all with the hope of winning a smile from the ladies. I was, consequently, watching him carefully, when I had the satisfaction of seeing him stop within a few steps of my stool and take off his hat: "Sir," he said in a full, rich voice, "will you permit me to see your drawing?"

I bowed courteously in acquiescence and pursued my work. After a moment of silent contemplation, the unknown horseman uttered a few words of commendation, which seemed drawn from him, as it were, by the force of his impressions, then again addressing me, he said: "Sir, permit me to express my admiration for your talent; we shall, without doubt, owe to you the preservation of these ruins which are so great an ornament to our part of the country."

I at once abandoned my reserve, as it would only have been childish to maintain it under the circumstances, and answered in a proper spirit that he was very kind to express himself thus, as my work was but the rough sketch of an amateur. I added, I had the strongest possible desire that these charming ruins should be preserved, but that the most important part of my work seemed likely to be left undone, for want of some historical information, for which I had vainly searched the archives of the department.

"Upon my word, sir," rejoined the stranger, "you are giving me the greatest possible pleasure. I have in my own

library the larger part of the abbey archives. Como and consult them at your leisure, I shall be very grateful to you."

I thanked him with some little embarrassment, expressed my regret at not having known this sooner, and added that I had every reason to think that a letter from Paris was then on its way to recall me. I had risen while making this reply, seeking to soften the churlishness of my answer, by my courteous attitude. I wished also to gain a clearer idea of the person to whom I was speaking; he proved to be a handsome man of about sixty, whose large blue eyes expressed the most benevolent kindness.

"Come now!" he said, "let us be frank. You do not care to mingle with that band of reckless young people over there whom I was unable to prevent yesterday from indulging in an act of folly which I sincerely hope you will overlook. Let me here mention, sir, that I am the Marquis de Malouet. But to return to yesterday, the honours of the day were certainly on your side. They wished to see you and you would not be seen. You had your own way. So what more do you want?"

I could not help laughing heartily at hearing such a favourable interpretation put upon my unfortunate escapade.

"You laugh!" cried the marquis. "Bravo! we shall soon understand each other. Now then, what is there to prevent you from passing several days with me? My wife begged me to ask you to do so; she understood at once all the annoyance you must have suffered yesterday. She is as good as an angel, that wife of mine! She is no longer young, is always ill, little more than a breath in fact, but she is all the same an angel. You shall be installed in my library, you shall live there as a hermit if that pleases you. I see it all, my young guests have really frightened you; you are a man of serious tastes, I understand that sort of character! Well, you will find some one to talk with; my wife is witty and clever, and I believe I have some little ability. I like exercise, it is



necessary to my health ; but you must not take me for a savage. Oh ! dear no, not at all ! I shall astonish you. You like whist, I presume, we will play together ; you like to live well, delicately I mean, as suits a man of taste and intelligence ! Well, then, as you like good living, I am your man ! I have an excellent cook, in fact, just now, I have two, one who is leaving and the other who has just arrived, and there is naturally a great contest between them, a regular tournament, and you shall help me name the winner. Come," added he, laughing at his own breathless fluency of speech, "it is settled then, is it not ? you will come home with me ?"

Happy is the man, Paul, who knows how to say "No." He alone is master of his time, his fortune, and his honour ! A man should know how to say "No" even to a beggar, a woman, an amiable old gentleman, or risk throwing away his charity, losing his dignity and his independence. For the lack of a manly straightforward "No," how many miseries, how many failures, how many crimes have taken place since the days of Adam !

While I considered the invitation I had just received, all these reflections presented themselves to my mind. I realised their wisdom fully, and I answered "Yes." A fatal "yes," by which I forfeited my paradise, exchanging a retreat which was completely to my taste, peaceful, laborious, romantic and free, for the thralldom of a sojourn where the life of society displays all the excitement of its insipid dissipation.

I begged for a little time to make the necessary preparations for my removal, and M. de Malouet left me, after a very warm shake of the hand, declaring that he had taken a great fancy to me, and that he should excite his two cooks to give me a triumphal reception. "I shall tell them," said he, "that an artist, a poet, is coming ; this will stimulate their imaginations !"

Towards five o'clock, two servants from the château came

for my little luggage, and informed me that a carriage was in waiting on the top of the hill. I bade farewell to my cell ; I thanked my hosts and embraced the children, dirty and unkempt as they were. They all appeared to be heartily sorry for my departure, and I too felt extraordinarily sad. I know not what strange feeling attached me to this valley, but I left it with a heart as heavy as when one leaves one's native land.

Good-bye, till to-morrow, Paul, for I can write no more now.

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#### IV.

*September 26th.*

The château de Malouet is a massive and rather ordinary structure, dating back about a century. Beautiful avenues, an extensive courtyard, and a park full of magnificent old trees give it, however, an imposing appearance. The old marquis came down the steps to receive me, drew my arm within his own, and after conducting me through a succession of corridors, introduced me to an enormous salon which was almost dark. I could just distinguish, by the flickering flame on the hearth, about twenty persons of both sexes, divided here and there into groups. Thanks to this dim twilight, my entry, which I had pictured to myself as solemn and somewhat alarming, passed almost unremarked. I had only time to pay my respects to my hostess, who greeted me in a feeble but sympathetic voice, when she took my arm to conduct me to the dining-room, having determined, so it appeared, to refuse no mark of consideration to a runner so surprisingly agile as myself.

When we were seated at table, in a room full of light, I soon found that my feats of the day before had not been forgotten, and that I was the centre of attention ; but I bravely bore the cross-fire of curious and ironical glances, intrenched

on the one side behind a mountain of flowers which ornamented the centre of the table, and supported on the other by the ingenuous kindness of my hostess. Madame de Malouet is one of those rare old ladies whom a superior strength of mind or a great purity of soul saved from despair when they reached the critical age of forty, and who have preserved from the shipwreck of their youth a solitary spar, which is, however, a sovereign charm—that of grace.

Small and frail, with a face worn and pale from habitual suffering, she fully answered her husband's description. Devoting, without a show of pretension, the most exquisite care to her person, but a care that is void of coquetry, totally forgetting the loss of her youth, and touchingly desirous not of pleasing but rather of being forgiven, so to speak, for having grown old, such is this lady whom I adore. She has travelled much, read much, and knows Paris thoroughly. I was soon embarked in a conversation such as two persons who meet for the first time often enjoy, when they wander from pole to pole, touching lightly on subject after subject, arguing many points with gaiety and agreeing on others.

M. de Malouet took advantage of the removal of a large dish which intervened between us, to observe the state of my relations with his wife. He seemed highly satisfied with our evident good understanding, and addressing me, said: "My dear sir, I have told you of my rival cooks, and the moment has come for you to prove to me that you merit the high reputation of discernment which I bestowed on you when announcing your arrival to these virtuosos. Alas! I am about to lose the more ancient and without doubt the more learned of these celebrities—the illustrious Jean Rostain. It was he, sir, who on arriving here from Paris two years ago, uttered these memorable words to me: 'A man of taste, M. le Marquis, can no longer live in Paris; the Parisians encourage a certain romantic cookery that will soon

spoil their palates.' In short, sir, Rostain is a rarity with an opinion and classic tastes! Well! you have just partaken successively of two dishes consisting mainly of cream; in my opinion both these dishes are a success, but Rostain's appears to me to be the superior by far. Come, sir, I am curious to know, if you can by yourself assign to each tree its fruit, and render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's. Now we will see!"

I glanced at the remains of the two dishes to which the marquis alluded, and I did not hesitate to qualify as truly classical, the one, which was crowned by a temple of Lovo, with an image of the small god, in sugar.

"Well hit!" cried the marquis. "Bravo! Rostain shall hear of this and his heart will rejoice. Ah! sir, why did I not make your acquaintance a few days sooner? I might then have kept Rostain, or rather, to express it more correctly, Rostain might possibly have kept me, for, my dear friends, good huntsmen as you all are, I cannot conceal from you that you are not in the good graces of my old cook, and I am nearly convinced that his departure, in spite of the various reasons he gives, is in reality to be attributed to the indifference with which you receive his best efforts. I fancied that I was giving him an agreeable piece of information, when I told him some weeks since that our hunting excursions would ensure him an appreciative circle, worthy of his talents.

" 'M. le Marquis will excuse me,' Rostain replied, with a melancholy smile, 'if I do not share his illusions. In the first place a huntsman devours, he does not eat; he comes to table with the appetite of a shipwrecked mariner, *iratum ventrem*, as Horace says, and swallows, without choice or reflection, *gulæ parens*, the most serious productions of an artist; in the second place, the violent exercise of hunting develops in the diner an immoderate thirst, which is usually

only too copiously quenched. Now M. le Marquis is of course aware of the opinion of the ancients in regard to the excessive use of wine during meals,—it ruins the palate, *exsurdant vina palatum* ! Nevertheless, M. le Marquis may rest assured that I will do my best for his guests, with my usual conscientiousness, though with the painful certainty of not being understood.’

“As he finished these words, Rostain wrapped his toga more closely about him, addressed to heaven the look of unrecognised genius, and left my dressing-room.”

“I should have thought,” I observed to the marquis, “that you would have considered no sacrifice too great, which enabled you to retain this man of intellect.”

“You judge me correctly, sir,” replied M. de Malouet ; “but you will see that it was quite impossible. Just a week ago, M. Rostain having asked for a special audience, made known to me that he was under the painful necessity of quitting my service. ‘Good heavens ! M. Rostain,’ I exclaimed ; ‘why is this and where will you go ?’

“‘To Paris,’ was his sententious reply.

“‘How, to Paris !’ I said, ‘Why, you shook the dust of that Babylon from off your feet, as I thought, for ever. The decay of taste, the fashion more and more pronounced for romantic cookery ! these are your own words, Rostain.’

“He sighed as he replied : ‘That is all very true, M. le Marquis, but provincial life has drawbacks for which I was not prepared.’

“I then offered him the most fabulous wages, which he refused. ‘Tell me, my friend,’ I urged, ‘what is it that has gone wrong ? Ah ! I see, you do not like the kitchen maid ; she disturbs your meditations with her vulgar songs. Very well ! I will dismiss her ! Is not that enough ? Is it then Antoine who displeases you ? He shall go also ! Or can it be the coachman ? He shall follow !’

"In short, gentlemen, I offered up my whole household as a sacrifice before him. To all these concessions the old fellow only shook his head to show his indifference.

"'But come,' I cried, 'in heaven's name, M. Rostain, explain yourself!'

"'Well, M. le Marquis,' Jean Rostain answered, 'I will admit to you that it is really impossible for me to live in a place where I cannot find some one to play me at billiards!'

"Really, this was too much," continued the marquis with a pleasant laugh, "for I could not offer to play with him myself, and so was compelled to put up with his loss. I wrote, therefore, at once to Paris, and last night a young cook with a magnificent moustache arrived, who informed me that his name was Jacquemart. The classic Rostain, with sublime renunciation, wished to assist M. Jacquemart in his preliminary labours, and this is why I am enabled to offer you to-day, gentlemen, this eclectic repast, whose hidden beauties and merits have, I fear, been appreciated only by this gentleman and myself."

M. de Malouet rose from table, as he concluded his narrative. After coffee, I followed the smokers into the courtyard. It was a magnificent evening. The marquis and I strolled to the avenue, the fine gravel of which was glittering in the moonlight between the dark shadows of the great chestnut trees. While carrying on a familiar conversation, he subjected me to a kind of examination on many subjects, as if to convince himself that I was worthy of the interest he had hitherto so gratuitously taken in me. We were far from being of the same mind on all points, but as we were both sincere and well-meaning, those we discussed afforded us almost as much pleasure as those upon which we were agreed.

This epicurean is a thinker, and his thoughts, which are always generous, have taken a whimsical and paradoxical

turn in the solitude in which he revolves them. I should like to give you some notion of this.—He embarrassed me not a little by asking abruptly, “What is your opinion, sir, of our nobility, considered as an institution of our age and country?”—He saw me hesitate. “Come, speak out fearlessly. You see how frank I am!”

“Well, sir,” replied I, “my feelings towards the nobility are those of an artist; I regard the institution in the light of a national monument—a fine historical ruin, which I love and respect so long as it refrains from falling upon me.”

“Oh, no,” rejoined he, laughing, “we shall, I fear, be a long time in coming to an understanding on this subject, for I shall never allow myself to be a ruin, even an historical one. I suppose you would be much astonished to hear me say that, according to my views, France could not possibly exist without her nobility?”

“I should be astonished indeed,” said I.

“Nevertheless, such is my opinion, and I hold it to be well founded. I can no more conceive a nation without an aristocratic class, a nobility, than an army without its staff. An aristocracy is the intellectual and moral staff of the country.”

“Is ours that?”

“In former days it was all that it ought to be, in proportion to the civilisation of the age; it was once the head, heart, and arm of the nation. Since then, I own, it has failed to recognise the new part it has been called upon to play in modern times, and never more cruelly than in the last century. Now, while recognising this, it also appears to ignore it. If heaven had blessed me with a son—and here I am touching a sore place in my heart—I should have felt it one of my first duties to arouse him from the moody, dejected indolence in which the residue of our ancient class live and die, vainly regretting the past. Without giving up

taking the lead in courage—an ancient virtue which has never ceased, as we see, to be of service to our country, I would have had him take the lead, or at any rate join the leaders in literature, science, taste, and other ways where the noble activity of mind that now secures us a place under the sun finds expression! You may tell me that an aristocracy ought carefully to mark the progress of civilisation in its age and country, and not merely to follow but to lead it! You may tell me too, if you like, that it ought never definitely close its ranks, that it requires to be recruited from time to time by fresh blood, that it ought to be eager to claim all eminent merit and conspicuous virtue, and I will frankly admit that I share your opinion. But never tell me that a nation can dispense with its aristocracy, or at least allow me in that case to ask what you think of American civilisation, for that is the only one which is perfectly free from the immediate or remote influence of an aristocracy, either in the present or the past.”

“It seems to me,” returned I, endeavouring to avoid a direct reply to his question, “that in France at least we have the intellectual staff which you demand, the natural and legitimate aristocracy of labour and merit. This, I hope, we may never lose. To form it into a distinct class, would, in my opinion, be to shackle and restrain it. Why create an institution when we have an eternal fact, naturally renewed and perpetuated from generation to generation?”

“Pooh, pooh,” cried the marquis, growing warm, “these are new ideas indeed! Can you seriously maintain that a nation, national character, and national civilisation can grow, develop, and be preserved by the mere action of more or less gifted individuals furnished by each successive generation? Ask history, or rather let us turn again to America; the United States furnish, like all others, I suppose, their natural contingent of talented and virtuous men; but have they



anything that you can call a national character? What is it? Kindly favour me with a single distinctive trait? Why, they have not even a capital city! I defy them to show it! A capital can only be the residence of the aristocracy. No, sir, the fact will not suffice; there is a law we cannot fail to recognise; nothing under heaven is great, strong, or enduring, without authority, unity, and tradition. These three conditions of greatness and stability are only to be found in a permanent institution. There must be a sacred tribe to guard the sacred fire. We require a body of picked men who will consider it a duty and hereditary honour to concentrate within itself the culture of the national mind, to maintain, practise, or encourage virtue, urbanity, science, art, and the industries which go to make up what all the world reveres under the name of French civilisation. Only picture to yourself an aristocracy thus regenerated, comprehending its vocation, neither exclusive nor vulgar, resting its official supremacy always upon a real and manifest superiority, and our society, civilisation, and country must inevitably flourish and extend. Without it, a contrary result will ensue. Paris, the ancient symbol of aristocracy, will keep you afloat for a while, and then—Well, what have you to say to all this?"

"If you will allow me, I shall reply by a question: what is your own line of action in the little corner of France which you occupy?"

"Why, I act up to my principles, trying, to the best of my ability, to be the most exalted expression of my age and country. I introduce good sense, taste, and drainage into the neighbourhood. I condescend to be mayor of the commune. I build schools, asylums and churches for my peasantry,—all at my own expense, you understand."

"And how do your peasantry behave?" said I.

"Why, confound it, they detest me!"

"You see," said I, laughing, "that the spirit of the age does not altogether go with your theories, since your rank is sufficient to close the people's heart and blind their eyes to your virtues and benevolent actions."

"Oh, the spirit of the age!" exclaimed the marquis, "if it goes against us, we must turn it round! That is simple weakness, my young friend! I say with Rostain; if you yield servile obedience to what you call the spirit of the age, the romantic school will carry you to all manner of lengths!—Well, now let us join the ladies and have our rubber."

As we approached the château, we heard a loud outburst of noise and laughter, and observed nearly a dozen young men at the foot of the double flight of steps, leaping and bounding, as if trying to reach the summit without the aid of the steps themselves. As soon as the moonlight allowed us to distinguish a white robe up above, we were able to solve the object of these violent gymnastics. It was evidently a tournament, and the victor was to be announced by the owner of the white dress. The young lady (if she had not been young, they would not have taken such high leaps), was leaning over the balustrade, carelessly exposing her garlanded head and bare shoulders to the dew of an autumn evening and Dian's rays; as she bent lightly forward, she held out to the competitors an object not easily discernible from afar, a delicate cigarette, made by her own white hand and pink nails. The scene was a pretty one, yet it did not seem altogether to M. de Malouet's taste, for his good humoured accent was tinged with evident impatience as he murmured: "Ah, I was sure of it! It is the Little Countess!"

I need scarcely add that I recognised in the Little Countess the fair equestrian with the blue feathers, whose temperament, with or without this decoration, appeared to be the same. She, on her side, recognised me, as you will see

presently. As M. de Malouet and I ascended the steps, leaving the rival claimants to struggle and contend with increasing ardour, the Little Countess, intimidated possibly by the marquis's presence, put an end to the scene by thrusting the cigarette into my hand with these words: "Take it, it is yours! You are the best leaper of them all!" And with this keen shaft, which had the double advantage of offending both victor and vanquished, she disappeared.

This was the last remarkable episode in the evening, so far as I was concerned. After the rubber, I pleaded a little fatigue, and M. de Malouet was good enough himself to instal me in a pretty room with chintz hangings, adjoining the library. For half the night I was disturbed by the monotonous jingle of the piano and the roll of carriages, sounds of civilisation which made me more than ever regret my poor hermitage.

## CHAPTER V.

*September 26th.*

I HAVE been gratified by finding the historical documents I was in want of in the marquis's library. They are actually connected with the ancient charter of the abbey, and have an especial interest for the De Malouet family. It was a Guillaume Malouet, a noble knight, who in the middle of the twelfth century, with the consent of his sons Hugues, Foulques, Jean, and Thomas, restored the church and founded the abbey in favour of the Benedictine order, for the good of his soul and those of his ancestors, giving the monks, among other privileges and concessions, the abbey estates, a tithe of his revenues, half the wool of his flocks, three loads of wax to be fetched each year from Mont Saint Michel-on-the-Sea, with rights of wood, water, moorland, and mill—*et molen-dinum in eodem situ*. I enjoyed following, in the dog-Latin of

the period, a description of this familiar neighbourhood. It has not changed one whit.

The original charter dates from 1145. Subsequent charters prove that in the thirteenth century, the abbey of Rozel exercised a sort of patriarchate over all the Benedictine institutions then existing in the province of Normandy. Every year a general chapter of the order was held there under the presidency of the Abbot of Rozel, nearly a dozen other monasteries being represented on this occasion by their highest dignitaries. The discipline, work, and temporal and spiritual life of every Benedictine in the province were there controlled and reformed with the utmost strictness, as the noble language of the reports of these miniature councils attest. These dignified scenes transpired in the chapter-hall, which is now so scandalously profaned.

My abbey then held the foremost rank, in this large province, over an illustrious order, whose very name recalls the noblest and most austere of labours. These claims account for the magnificence of the church, and should protect its ruins. Henceforth I have before me the elements of a complete and interesting task, which I often forget, as I peruse these ancient charters, replete with little characteristic facts, incidents, and customs belonging to the record of each day, and which transport me into the very midst of the life of former ages. Those times were probably inferior to our own, but at all events they were different, and we need only dwell on the features that please us best. It may be that in studying the ideas, emotions, and habits of our predecessors, and making them as it were our own, we enjoy transporting our short individual life back into the past, and feeling the sensations of many ages stir within us during our transient career.

Besides the archives, the library is rich in other works, which divert my attention ; and then the social whirlwind

raging in the château militates against my independence. My excellent hosts too often curtail the liberty which they imagine they are giving me; like most people in society, they have no very clear idea of the consecutive occupation which we grace with the name of work, and an hour or two of reading seems to them the utmost strain of which a man's powers are capable in one day.—“Feel yourself perfectly at liberty! Go off to your cell! Work as much as you like!” says M. de Malouet each morning, and then, within another hour, he is at my door.—“Well, are you at work?”—“Yes, I am making a start.”—“Why, you have been at it these two hours! You will be killing yourself, my good friend. But of course, do just as you like!—Oh, my wife is in the drawing-room—you will join her as soon as you have finished, won't you?”—“Oh yes, certainly.”—“But not till you have quite finished, of course!”—And off he goes to shoot, or to take a walk by the sea-shore. As for me, I feel pre-occupied with the idea that I am expected, and feeling that I shall do nothing satisfactory for the rest of the morning, I soon decide upon joining Madame de Malouet; I find her in close converse with the curé or with Jacquemart; she has disturbed me, I interrupt her, and we exchange gracious smiles.

The forenoon generally passes in this fashion. In the morning I take a ride with the marquis, who kindly tries to spare me the tumult of the troop of visitors. In the evening I play whist, and then chat with the ladies, endeavouring in their society to shake off both my fame and my bearishness, for I hate to seem peculiar, especially in that way. To carry one's gravity so far as to seem stiff and ungracious in female society savours of pedantry; it sits ill even on the very talented, and is ridiculous in those who are less gifted. Then I retire, and work away in the library till a late hour, finding this a favourable opportunity.

The usual circle at the château consists of the marquis's guests, who are always numerous at this season of the year, and a few of his neighbours. The main object of all this company is to entertain M. de Malouet's only daughter, who comes down every year and spends the autumn with her parents. She is as beautiful as a sculptor's model, and enjoys herself with queenly dignity, holding converse with mortals in haughty monosyllables, uttered in a deep contralto. Some dozen years ago she married Lord A——, an Englishman in the diplomatic service, as handsome as he is phlegmatic. He occasionally addresses his wife in an English monosyllable, and she calmly replies by a French one. And yet three little lords, worthy of Lawrence's pencil, play majestically around this sublime couple, bearing testimony to a secret understanding between the two nations which escapes the vulgar eye.

A scarcely less remarkable couple joins us every day from a neighbouring château. The husband is a M. de Breuilly, formerly in the guards, and a bosom friend of the marquis. He is a lively old man and still the gay cavalier, wearing his hat jauntily on his close-cropped hair, which is gray. He has a trick, which may be natural to him, of giving a lilt to his sentences, and speaks with a deliberation which seems affected. In other respects he would be very pleasant, were not his mind constantly tortured by ardent jealousy, or a no less ardent fear of betraying his weakness, which is, however, quite patent to every one. It is hard to understand how, with such a disposition and plenty of sense, he could be guilty of such an error as at the age of five-and-fifty to marry a pretty young wife, a Creole into the bargain, or I am much mistaken.

"M. de Breuilly!" said the marquis, as he introduced me to this captious gentleman,—“my greatest friend, who will infallibly be yours too, and who will no less in-

fallibly cut your throat if you pay his wife too much attention."

"Good heavens, dear friend," returned M. de Breuilly with a sad laugh, emphasising each word in his peculiar fashion, "why should you represent me to this gentleman as the Othello of Lower Normandy! Of course ~~he~~ he can—he is perfectly at liberty—besides he knows the proprieties and is sure to observe them. In short, sir, allow me to introduce you to Madame Breuilly, and oblige me by making yourself agreeable."

I was rather surprised at his words, and my good nature or innocent malice made me take them literally. I at once seated myself by Madame de Breuilly's side, and began to pay her every attention within the bounds of propriety. Meanwhile M. de Breuilly glared at us from a distance; I saw his gray eyes flash like a burning coal; he laughed convulsively, made grimaces, stamped his foot, and cracked his finger-joints ominously. M. de Malouet suddenly walked up to me, asked me to take a hand at whist, and, drawing me aside, said, "What possesses you to go on so?"

"Why, what do you mean?" said I.

"Did I not warn you? I was perfectly serious. Look at De Breuilly! The gallant man has this one weakness, and every one here respects it. Pray follow their example."

The result of this gallant man's weakness is, that his wife is condemned to be perpetually shunned in society. A husband's bellicose reputation often acts as an additional attraction, but no man feels inclined to risk his life without the possibility of some apparent compensation, and this husband is sure to threaten you with a scene at any rate, not merely before you have reaped the harvest, but even before the seed is sown. This evidently acts as a discouragement to the most enterprising, and the seats right and left of Madame de Breuilly are generally vacant, in spite of her easy

grace, her large dark eyes, and the plaintive suppliant look which seems to say, Will no one lead me into temptation!

You might suppose that the poor wife's evident state of desertion would give her husband a sense of security. Not in the least. His ingenious mania turns it into a fresh source of perplexity,—“Dear friend,” said he yesterday to M. de Malbuet, “you know that I am not more jealous than other husbands; but though I am no Orosmanus, I do not profess to be a George Dandin. Well, there is one thing which troubles me; you must have noticed that no one seems to be paying my wife any attention?”

“Well, if that is what troubles you—”

“Of course it is; you must confess that it is unnatural. My wife is pretty; then why should she not receive as much attention as others? There must be something beneath the surface.”

Fortunately, and greatly to the promotion of general sociality, all the ladies staying in succession at the château are not guarded by dragons of this stamp. Some few, and among them two or three stray Parisians, display a freedom of manner, love of pleasure, and exaggerated elegance which outstrip all the bounds of discretion. You know how little I appreciate this kind of being, corresponding so indifferently with my ideas of the duties of woman, even when she is one of the gay world; still I have no hesitation in taking the part of these giddy things—their conduct seems even to approach my ideal—when I hear in the evening the vulgar talk of certain pious matrons here distilling against them the poison of the meanest envy that can fill a provincial mind. By the way, it is not always necessary to leave Paris to witness such a wretched spectacle as these country ladies launching forth against what they term vice, meaning thereby, youth, elegance, distinction, charms,—in fact, whatever these good women no longer possess, or never owned.



And yet, however much these chaste shrews may disgust me with the virtue they profess to uphold—O Virtue, what crimes are committed in thy name!—I regret that I am forced to agree with them on one point, and to own that at least one of their victims seems to justify their reprobation and calumny. The most benevolent angel would have to veil his face before that finished model of dissipation, turbulence, vanity, and worldly extravagance, whose real name is the Countess de Palme, and her nickname the Little Countess; a very inappropriate *soubriquet* by the way, for the lady is by no means little, though slight in figure. Madame de Palme is five and twenty, and a widow; she spends the winter in Paris with a sister, and the summer in a Norman manor-house with her aunt, Madame de Pontbrian. Let me first describe the aunt.

This aunt, who belongs to an ancient and noble family, has two conspicuous merits, the fervour of her hereditary opinions and her strict devotion. These are two claims on our respect which I am perfectly ready to admit. Every firm principle and sincere sentiment is worthy of especial admiration in these days. Unfortunately Madame de Pontbrian appears to be one of those great devotees who are anything but good christians, who, reducing all the duties of their political or religious faith to a few minute observances of which they are absurdly proud, array both in a harsh and unattractive guise, the effect of which is to scare away proselytes. Outward observances amply satisfy her conscience, in her nature there is no trace of kindness or charity, and above all, no humility. Her lineage, her assiduity in church-going, and her annual pilgrimages to visit an illustrious exile (who would probably be very glad never to set eyes on her again), inspire this old witch with such an exalted idea of herself, and such profound contempt for her neighbour, that she is perfectly unsociable. She wears a

long face, and is constantly absorbed in the kind of worship which she regards as a duty owing to herself. She only deigns to speak to the Almighty, who must indeed be gracious if He listens to her.

Under the nominal patronage of this mystic duenna, the Little Countess enjoys an absolute independence which she thoroughly abuses. After spending the winter in Paris, where she actually wears out a pair of horses and a coachman a month by amusing herself in having a waltz at half-a-dozen different balls each evening, Madame de Palme feels the need of repose in the country. She comes down to stay with her aunt, vaults into the saddle, and away she gallops, no matter where, so long as she flies along. She generally directs her horse's head towards the château de Malouet, where the excellent hostess shows a liking for her which I cannot understand. Familiar with men and impertinent with women, the countess becomes a fair target for the indiscreet homage of the former and the jealous hatred of the latter. Being indifferent to public opinion, she seems to enjoy the coarsest incense of gallantry, but her especial craving is for noise, stir, excitement, and gaiety carried to the greatest extreme; what she requires every morning, afternoon, and evening is a shooting-party—no matter with what object—which she is wild in directing, a game at lansquenet, at which she breaks the bank, and a giddy cotillon which she leads till daybreak. A single pause, a moment of repose, contemplation or reflection,—of which indeed she is quite incapable—would kill her. Never was there an existence at once so full and so void, an activity more incessant and more sterile.

Thus she rushes through life, never drawing bridle, graceful, careless, busy, and as ignorant as her horse. When this woman reaches the fatal goal, she will exchange the annihilation of restlessness for that of eternal repose, without the

shadow of a serious idea, the feeblest notion of duty, or the glimpse of a thought worthy a human being having ever passed, even in a dream, through the narrow brain which lies behind her lovely stupid white forehead. One might prophesy that death, at whatever age it may seize her, will find the Little Countess what she was in the cradle, could one venture to think that she has retained her innocence as well as her childishness. Can this mad creature have a soul?—I carelessly used the word annihilation, for I can hardly conceive the survival of anything in such a being when the idle fever and frivolous breath which seem alone to animate it are once fled.

I am too familiar with the miserable ways of the world to believe literally in the accusations of immoral conduct made against Madamo de Palme by these hags here, or by some of her rivals who pay her the tribute of envying her gifts. This is not what makes me so severe against her, as you will understand. When men are pitiless against certain faults, they mostly forget that part of their life may have been spent in encouraging their committal. But in the type of woman I have just been sketching there is something that shocks me even more than immorality itself, with which indeed it is often allied. And so, in spite of my wish to avoid any affectation of singularity, I have never been able to join the body of adorers in the wake of Madame de Palme's car. I do not know whether "the tyrant noticed my absence from her court;" I have been sometimes tempted to think so from the surprised and contemptuous glances which assail me as I pass; but it is simpler to ascribe these hostile symptoms to the antipathy existing between natures so dissimilar as ours. I, on my side, sometimes look at her with the startled air of surprise which the sight of such a psychological phenomenon cannot fail to awaken in any thoughtful person. Thus we are quits.

I ought rather to have written we *were* quits, for we are so no longer ; a dreadful little incident occurred last night, making a score on my side of the balance sheet which Madame de Palme will not find it easy to repay. I told you that Madame de Malouet, by some inexplicable refinement of christian charity, displayed a real liking for the Little Countess. I was talking to the marchioness in one corner of the drawing-room, and took the liberty of saying laughingly, that such a predilection on her part was setting a bad example, and that I could never quite understand the passage in the Gospels which represents the return of a single sinner as of more value than the steady well-doing of the ninety and nine just persons, for it seemed to me especially discouraging to the well-doers.

"In the first place," said Madame de Malouet, "the just never feel discouraged, and in the second, there are no just persons. Do you, perchance, think yourself one?"

"I? Not in the least ; I am too conscious of the contrary."

"Then what gives you a right to judge so severely of your neighbour?"

"I do not regard Madame de Palme as my neighbour."

"A convenient way of escape. Madame de Palme, I must tell you, has been badly brought up, unhappily married, and always spoiled ; but, if you will believe me, she is a diamond in the rough."

"I see nothing but the rough." .

"You may be sure that all that is wanted is a good workman, that is to say, a good husband, to cut and polish it."

"Allow me to pity the future lapidary."

Madame de Malouet tapped her foot on the carpet, and showed other signs of impatience, which I was at first at a loss how to interpret, for she is never out of humour, when suddenly a luminous idea, as I thought, flashed across me ; I had no doubt that I had at length discovered this charming

old lady's weak point and only failing. She must have a mania for match-making, and in her charitable desire to snatch the Little Countess from the brink of destruction, must be secretly designing to link my unworthy destiny with hers. Full of this modest conviction, I was on my guard in a manner which now appears thoroughly absurd.

"Bless me !" said Madame de Malouet, "and all because you think she is not well-read ?"

"I don't think about her not being well-read," replied I, "I doubt whether she knows how to read."

"Come now, let me hear, what fault can you really find with her ?" resumed Madame de Malouet, in a voice trembling with emotion.

I thought I would demolish at a blow the matrimonial dream with which I supposed the marchioness was hugging herself.

"The fault I have to find with her," returned I, "is that of furnishing the world with the spectacle of triumphant vanity and exultant vice, which is most irritating even to such a sinner as myself. I have nothing to pique myself on, certainly, and no right to judge, but within me, as within a theatrical audience, there is an instinct for reason and morality which revolts against persons devoid of sense or virtue, and hates to see them triumphant."

The old lady's agitation redoubled : "Do you think I should receive her here, if she were guilty of all that her slanderers assert ?"

"I think it is impossible for you to think evil of any one."

"Nonsense, I assure you that you are wanting in penetration. The love scandals laid to her charge are so totally unlike her. The child has not an idea what love means."

"I am sure of that. It is proved by her vulgar coquetry. I am even ready to swear that no vagaries of imagination or

passion are in any way accountable for her errors, which leaves them inexcusable."

"Hush, hush," exclaimed Madame de Malouet, clasping her hands, "the poor child is left entirely to her own devices! I know her better than you do, and protest that under her manner, which I allow to be far too volatile, she conceals plenty of sense and an excellent disposition."

"Just as much of one as the other, I believe, madame."

"You are perfectly unbearable!" murmured Madame de Malouet, letting her hands drop in despair.—At the same moment I saw the curtain which half covered the door, near which we were sitting, violently shaking, and the Little Countess, quitting the hiding-place to which she had been confined by the rules of some game, appeared for a second in the embrasure of the door before joining the other players in a small room adjoining. I looked at Madame de Malouet; "what, was she there all the time?"

"To be sure she was. She heard us and saw us too. I made every sign that I could, but there was no stopping you!"

I felt somewhat confused, and regretted my harsh words, for in attacking the young lady so violently, I had been rather carried away by the heat of controversy than yielding to a feeling of serious animadversion. In fact, I care nothing about her, except that I cannot stand hearing her lauded to the skies. "What am I to do now?" asked I of Madame de Malouet. She considered a moment, shrugged her shoulders, and answered: "Nothing, it is your only course."

The slightest breath of air will make a full cup overflow; and thus the disagreeable impression left by this scene, seems to have exaggerated the annoyance under which I have been suffering almost ever since I came to this agreeable house. This continual round of gaiety and excitement,

these rides, dances, and dinners, the perpetual merriment and constant noise are more than irksome to me. I bitterly regret the time I have lost in reading and making researches, which have nothing to do with my official mission, and have scarcely assisted its progress; I regret the engagements made by my weakness in yielding to the kind persuasions of my hosts; I regret my vale of Tempé; and above all, Paul, I regret *you*. In this little society there are certainly sufficient kindly and superior minds to furnish material for the most agreeable and ennobling friendships; but they are lost among the worldly rabble rout. It is difficult to detach them from it, and you can never get them by themselves. M. and Madame de Malouet, and even M. Breuilly, when his senseless jealousy allows him the use of his faculties, are certainly choice spirits and have plenty of intelligence; but the more disparity in our age opens an abyss between us. As to the young people and men of my own age whom I meet here, they are all following more or less directly in the steps of Madame de Palme. I have only to abstain from doing so to ensure their treating me with a coolness akin to antipathy. My pride keeps me from breaking the ice, though two or three of them seem talented, and possessing instincts superior to the life they have chosen.

I often ask myself, Paul, whether you and I are any better than this flock of merry, light-hearted idlers, or merely different from them? They are as honest and honourable as ourselves; and, like us, they can lay no real claim to either true religion or virtue. So far we are alike. It is merely in our tastes and pleasures that we differ; all their minds are taken up with trifles, with affairs of gallantry and material activity; ours give an almost exclusive predilection to mental exertion, intellectual talent, and the good or bad fruits of human intelligence. So far as the world's opinion is concerned, the distinction is no doubt in our favour; but would this supe-

riority exist in a more exalted state of things, from a moral point of view, or, as I may say, in the sight of heaven? Are we, like them, merely yielding to an impulse which inclines us to take one line rather than the other, or are we acting from a sense of duty? What are the merits of an intellectual life in the eyes of the Almighty? Sometimes I feel as if we were professing a sort of pagan worship for the intellect which is of little value in His eyes, or even offends Him. More frequently I feel as if He meant us to use our minds, even though they should turn against Him, and that He accepts as His homage every vibration of the noble instrument of joy or torture with which He has endowed us.

Is not grief, in times of doubt and trouble, a sort of piety? I would fain hope so. You and I are something like those poor dreaming sphinxes who vainly asked the desert Thebans for so many ages to solve their eternal enigma. Is our folly greater and worse than the Little Countess's happy recklessness? We shall know some day. Meanwhile, do not lose, for my sake, the melancholy depths over which your sweet gaiety ripples; for you are no pedant, thank heaven; you can live cheerily and laugh heartily; but you are sick at heart, and for that very reason I shall love you as a brother until my dying day.

## CHAPTER VI.

*October 1st.*

PAUL, there is something going on here which I don't like; I want your advice, write and let me have it at once.

After finishing my letter on Thursday morning, I went downstairs to give it to the post-boy, who leaves early; then, as it wanted only a few minutes to lunch-time, I proceeded to the drawing-room, which was still deserted. As I was quietly turning over the pages of a review by the fire-



side, the door suddenly opened: I heard the rustling and crackling of a silk dress too voluminous to pass easily through an opening of only four feet, and the Little Countess, who had spent the night at the château, made her appearance. If you recall the vexatious dialogue in which I had taken part the previous evening, and which had been overheard by Madame de Palme, you will easily understand that this lady was the last person with whom I would willingly have found myself alone that morning.

I rose, and bowed low. She acknowledged my salute by an inclination of her head, which, however slight, was more than I had a right to expect. Her first paces along the room after catching sight of me, were characterised by hesitation and a sort of fluctuating movement; her walk resembled that of a partridge slightly winged and stunned by the shot. Should she go to the piano or the window, right, left, or straight on?—Evidently she did not know herself; but indecision is not her failing; she soon made up her mind, and crossing the large room with a firm step, came up to the fireplace, my own especial domain.

Standing before the arm-chair with my review in my hand, I awaited the course of events with an apparent gravity, which, I fear, failed to conceal my inward anxiety. I had cause, indeed, to apprehend an explanation and a scene. Under such circumstances, our innate feeling, added to the refining influences of education and social customs, the absolute freedom of attack, and the narrow limits of defence allowed, give women an immeasurable advantage over every man who is neither a brute nor a lover. In the special crisis which threatened me, a keen sense of my misdemeanour, and a reminiscence of the almost insulting form my offence had taken, deprived me of all thoughts of resistance: I felt myself completely at the mercy of a young, indignant, and imperious woman. My attitude was most abject.

Madame de Palme took her stand within two paces of me, rested her right hand on the marble chimney-piece, and stretched the bronze slipper which enclosed her left foot out to the blaze. Having thus installed herself, she turned towards me, and without speaking a word seemed to enjoy the expression of my countenance, which, as I have told you, was quite crestfallen. I determined to return to my seat and resume my reading: but felt first obliged to pave the way by remarking civilly:—"You are not wanting this review, madame?"

"Thank you, sir, I don't know how to read." Such was the answer curtly returned. I made a courteous gesture with my head and hand, as if to express a mild sympathy with the deficiency just revealed, and then sat down. I felt calmer now that I had received the enemy's fire. Honour seemed satisfied.

And yet, after a few minutes' silence, the embarrassing nature of my situation again began to weigh upon me; I tried in vain to become absorbed in my reading, a myriad tiny bronze slippers seemed playing over the paper. I should decidedly have preferred an open scene to this persistent and embarrassing tête-à-tête, to the silent hostility betrayed to my furtive glances by Madame de Palme's restless foot, the clink of her rings on the marble mantelpiece, and the quiver of her nostrils. I could not refrain from heaving a sigh of relief as the door suddenly opened, introducing upon the scene a fresh person whom I could look upon as an ally. \*

This was one of Lady A—'s early friends, named Madame Durmaître. She is a widow, and very handsome, and is distinguished by a lighter shade of folly than that by which she is surrounded. Owing to this and the superiority of her charms, she has long vanquished the hostility of Madame de Palme, who, in allusion to her rival's sombre style of dress,

languishing style of beauty, and slightly doleful conversation, amuses herself among the young people, by dubbing her the Malabar widow. Madame Durmaître is not in the least witty; but she is intelligent, fairly well-read, and of a pensive turn of mind. She prides herself on her conversational ability, and finding me devoid of any other social talent, she has taken it into her head that I must possess this one at least, and has determined to confirm her opinion. The result has been the establishment of a somewhat assiduous and almost cordial intercourse between us, for if I cannot respond to all her hopes, I at least listen attentively to the slight melancholy pathos which is peculiar to her. I look as if I understood her, and she feels grateful. The truth is, I am never tired of listening to her musical voice, contemplating her perfect features, and admiring her large dark eyes, which are veiled by long thick lashes. Don't be uneasy about me, though; I decided some time ago that the time for being loved, and therefore for loving, was quite over; and love is an ailment to which we are never liable when we make a real effort to repress its early convulsions.

Madame de Palme turned as she heard the door open; her blue eyes flashed fiercely as she recognised Mademoiselle Durmaître; fate had placed a victim within her reach. She allowed the handsome widow to take a few steps towards us in the slow melancholy fashion peculiar to her, and then burst into a laugh:—"Bravo," said she emphatically: "that is the very step for the scaffold, a victim dragged to the altar! Iphigenia, or rather Hermoine,

'Pleurante après son char vous voulez qu'on me voie!'

Who was it wrote that line?—I am so ignorant!—It must have been your friend M. de Lamartine, I think! You must have been in his mind, my dear!"

"What, dear madame, are you quoting poetry now?" said Madame Durmaître, who has not the gift of repartee.

"Why not, dear madame? Are you to monopolise it all? 'Pleurante après son char—' I have heard Rachel say those words,—no, they cannot be Lamartine's, they are Boileau's. By the way, dear Nathalie, I mean to ask you to give me a few lessons in serious and improving conversation. What fun it will be! I will begin now,—which do you like best, Lamartine or Boileau?"

"My dear Bathilde, there is no comparing them," returned Madame Durmaître, sensibly enough, but perhaps rather too frankly.

"Oh, indeed!" rejoined Madame de Palme. Then abruptly pointing to me, she said: "Perhaps you prefer this gentleman, who writes poetry too?"

"Not so, madame," said I; "you are mistaken, that is out of my line."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought you did!"

Madame Durmaître, who doubtless owes her undisturbed serenity to a consciousness of her queenly beauty, merely smiled carelessly and disdainfully. She sank back in the easy-chair which I had vacated for her. "What wretched weather it is," said she, addressing me; "this autumnal sky seems to weigh on one's spirits! I have just been looking out of the window: all the trees look like eypresses and the country like a cemetery. One could fancy that—"

"No, no, pray stop there, Nathalie," broke in Madame de Palme. "You are exerting yourself too much before luncheon, it will do you harm."

"My dear Bathilde, I am sure you must have had a very bad night," said the handsome widow.

"Who, I? not in the least! I had heavenly dreams, actual ecstasies, you know what I mean. My spirit held intercourse with other souls, souls like yours—angels smiled at

me through oypress-trees, beside all other sorts of absurdities." Madamo Durmaître coloured slightly, shrugged her shoulders, and took up the review which I had laid on the chimney-piece.

"By the way, Nathalie," resumed Madame de Palme, "do you know who we are to have at dinner to-day—what men I mean?" The good Nathalie mentioned M. de Brouilly, with two or three other married men, and the curé of the parish.

"Then I shall take my departure after luncheon," said the Little Countess, glancing at me.

"Very polite to us, certainly," murmured Madame Durmaître.

"You are aware," returned the other with imperturbable coolness, "that I care for no society but that of men, and there are three classes whom I consider as belonging to neither sex; I mean married men, priests, and scholars."

As Madame de Palme concluded her sentence, she gave me another look, which was, however, perfectly unnecessary to make me understand that she included me in her classification of a neuter species: it could only be under the third category, little entitled as I was to figure there, that I could be ranked; but it does not take much to establish the reputation of a scholar with ladies.

The sound of a bell in the courtyard was heard almost immediately, and she continued: "Ah, here is lunch, thank heaven, for I am diabolically hungry, if the blessed spirits and those in purgatory will forgive me for saying so." And gliding to the other end of the room, she threw herself on the neck of the Marquis de Malouet, as he entered, followed by his guests. I, for my part, hastened to offer my arm to Madame Durmaître, and try by my civilities to make her forget the storm brought about her ears by the faint sympathy she shows me.

As you may have noticed, the Little Countess, on this occasion, had manifested, as usual, little restraint or taste in the language she employed, but also far more mental power than I had given her credit for, and though this was directed against me, I could not help hailing it, for I hate fools, and have always found them do more harm than positively bad people. Besides, to render her justice, her reprisals, in addition to having rebounded in great measure from my innocent head, seemed to me fair enough : they were not vicious, and revealed a spirit of mischief rather than the serious malice so often assumed by feminine hatred, even under less provocation than the Little Countess had received. In short, I had smiled to myself more than once during this skirmish, and its effect was rather to extenuate than aggravate my enemy's offences. A shade of pity for the badly brought-up girl and misdirected woman was henceforth mingled with the repulsion and contempt which I felt for the extravagant woman of the world.

Women are quick in discriminating shades of feeling, and Madame de Palme did not let mine escape her. She was vaguely conscious of the slight turn in her favour ; nor did she fail to exaggerate its extent and try to abuse it. For two days she let fly winged darts, which I received with good humour, even repaying them with slight attentions, for I was still feeling penitent for the rude expressions I had used when speaking to Madame de Malouet, nor did I think them sufficiently expiated by the slight martyrdom I had undergone the day before in company with the handsome Malabar widow.

This was all that Madame Bathilde de Palme needed, to make her believe she might treat me as vanquished territory, and add Ulysses to his companions. In the course of the day before yesterday, she again and again tested the extent of her increasing power over my heart and will by asking

me to render two or three little services, which every one here is anxious to have the honour of performing for her, and which I discharged with civility but evident coldness. There is sometimes a charm in these little acts of servitudo, especially when they are not exacted; but there is not the same ready grace to yield in every age and character. Serious and rather rigid natures need never churlishly refuse the little amenities of social life, but they should not go beyond what is necessary, nor be anxious to undertake offices which youth and great agility can alone prevent from seeming ridiculous.

Nevertheless, in spite of the extreme coolness with which I had received her behests all day, Madame de Palme believed herself perfectly successful; she rashly judged that all she had to do was to rivet my chain, and add me to her triumphal procession, a feeble tribute indeed to her charms, but prized by her from having been contested. In the course of the evening, as I rose from the whist-table, she walked up to me deliberately and begged me to honour her by becoming her partner in the cotillon. I laughingly excused myself on the ground of perfect inexperience; she insisted, declaring that I was sure to be a good dancer, and reminding me of the agility I had displayed in the forest. To cut short the debate, she seized my arm in a familiar manner, adding that she was not accustomed to be refused.

"Nor I to make an exhibition of myself, madame," returned I.

"What, not even to please me?"

"Not even on that account, madame, even were this my only way of doing so."—These words, on which I had dwelt with emphasis, were accompanied with a bow and smile, and she insisted no further. She suddenly relinquished my arm and joined a group of dancers, who stood watching us in the distance with manifest interest. They received her with

smiles and whispers, and she replied in a few rapid sentences, of which I only caught the word "revenge." I paid no further attention at the moment, and my mind soared into the clouds with that of Madame Durmaître.

Next day, there was to be a grand hunt in the forest. I had arranged to take no part in it, wishing to profit by a whole day alone to progress with my unfortunate task. Towards noon the hunting-party assembled in the court-yard of the château, which resounded for a quarter of an hour with the piercing sound of trumpets, the stamping of horses, and the yelping of the hounds. Then the noisy troop plunged down the avenue; the sounds gradually died away, and I was left my own master, with my mind unperturbed in a silence all the sweeter for being singularly rare in my present quarters.

I had been enjoying my solitude for some moments and turning over the folio of *Neustria pia* with a smile at my own happiness, when I fancied that I heard a horse galloping up the avenue, and soon after over the paved court. "It must be some one late for the hunt!" said I to myself, and taking up my pen, I began to extract from the enormous volume the passage relating to the general chapter of the Benedictines, when I was annoyed by a second and more serious interruption, a knock at the library door.

I shook my head impatiently, and said "Come in!" in the tone in which I might have said "Get out!" Some one entered. Only a few minutes before I had seen Madame de Palme take flight, with her feathers, at the head of the cavalcade, and it was with no little surprise that I found her standing within two steps of me, when the door opened. Her head was uncovered and her hair caught up behind in some whimsical fashion; in one hand she held her whip, while with the other she raised her long riding-skirt. The wild ride she had just taken served to exaggerate the expression



of audacity common to her appearance. And yet her voice seemed to have less than its usual confidence, as she said, on entering: "Oh, I beg your pardon! Is not Madame de Malouet here?"

I had risen to my full height. "No, madame, she is not."

"Oh, pray excuse me. Do you know where she is?"

"No, madame, but if you wish, I will inquire."

"Thanks, I will go and find her—I have had an accident."

"Indeed, madame?"

"Oh, nothing of any consequence,—a branch tore the band off my hat, and I lost my feathers—"

"Your blue feathers?"

"Yes—my blue feathers—and I have come back to the château to get my band sewn on again—I suppose you have come up here to study?"

"Certainly, madame, it is the best thing I can do."

"Are you very much engaged just now?"

"Yes, very much, madame."

"How unlucky!"

"What do you mean?"

"Because—I wanted—I had thought of asking you to accompany me to the forest. By the time I start again, the party will have nearly reached it, and I can scarcely go so far—all by myself."

While chirping out this rather confused explanation, the Little Countess looked so reserved and anxious, that the suspicions aroused in my mind by her abrupt entrance gathered strength. "You distress me indeed, madame," returned I; "I shall never cease to regret missing the delightful opportunity you are so kind as to place within my reach, but I am obliged to forward this paper by to-morrow's post, as the Ministry are impatient to receive it."

"Are you afraid of losing your appointment?"

"I have none, madame, so——"

"Well then, let the Ministry wait, and I shall feel flattered."

"That would be impossible, madame."

"Why," retorted she, tartly, "you cannot be so eccentric! Don't you care to make yourself agreeable to me?"

"Madame," replied I dryly, in return, "I am most anxious to make myself agreeable, but I don't care to make you win your wager."

I threw out this insinuation at a venture, basing it on some reminiscences and tokens which you may have gleaned from my story. I had hit the nail on the head. Madame de Palme coloured up to her eyes, stammered out a few words which I failed to catch, and left the room quite disconcerted.

This precipitate retreat left me greatly embarrassed. I cannot admit that we ought to carry our respect for the weaker sex so far as to bow blindly to every blow which a woman's caprice may aim at our repose or dignity; but our right of legitimate defence in such encounters is circumscribed within narrow and delicate limits, beyond which I feared I had strayed. Madame de Palme was alone in the world, and had no protection but that of her sex, which made me feel it extremely painful to have yielded so completely to the otherwise excusable irritation caused by her impertinent intrusion. While I was endeavouring to establish a balance between our respective grievances and thus quiet my scruples, a knock was again heard at the library door, and Madame de Malouet entered, much disturbed.— "Pray tell me what has happened," said she.

I gave her a detailed account of my conversation with Madame de Palme, and while expressing my regret for the sharp words I had used, added that I could not understand the lady's behaviour towards me, that twice within the last four and twenty hours she had made me the subject of her

wagers, which was bestowing far too much attention on a man who merely asked her to care as little about him as he did about her.

"Bless me," said the good marchioness, "I am not reproaching you. I have kept an eye both on your behaviour and hers for the last few days, but this is a disagreeable state of things. The child has just thrown herself into my arms in tears. She declares that you have treated her like a creature—"

"Madame," said I, remonstrating, "I gave you a verbatim report of the words I used."

"It is not your words, but your tone and manner. Let me speak to you frankly, M. George: are you afraid of falling in love with Madame de Palme?"

"Not in the least."

"Do you wish her to fall in love with you?"

"Just as little, I assure you."

"Well then, oblige me by pocketing your pride this once, and going to the hunt with Madame de Palme."

"Madame!"

"You may think my advice strange, but believe that I am not giving it without reflection. Your coldness towards Madame de Palme is precisely what attracts this spoiled, imperious child. She kicks against a resistance to which she has never been accustomed. Be humble and give in, to oblige me."

"Do you really think, madame—?"

"I think," resumed the old lady, laughing, "that, if you will forgive my saying so, your chief merit in her eyes will be gone as soon as you submit to her yoke like the rest of the world."

"Well, I must say, madame, that you put things in a new light. I should never have thought of attributing Madame de Palme's plaguing me to any sentiment likely to flatter me."

"And you are right," returned she quickly; "so far, thank heaven, there is nothing of the sort; still there might be, and I feel sure you are too well-principled to wish it."

"I will be guided entirely by your advice, madame, and put on my hat and gloves at once. How Madame de Palme will receive my tardy attentions remains to be seen."

"She will be ready enough to receive them, if they are offered with a good grace."

"I will do my best, madame, rely on it."

Upon receiving this assurance, Madame de Malouet held out her hand, and I kissed it with profound respect but scant gratitude.

When I came down into the drawing-room, booted and spurred, Madame de Palme was there alone: leaning back in an easy-chair, and hidden by her skirts, she was putting the finishing stitches to her band. She raised her eyes, but lowered them at once, and very red they looked.

"Madame," said I, "I am so grieved to have offended you, that I venture to ask you to forgive my atrocious manners. I place myself at your disposal; if you refuse my escort, you will be inflicting a mortification which I own to having deserved, but which will make my distress greater than my offence, which is saying a great deal."

Madame de Palme, more struck with my contrite tone than my diplomatic pathos, raised her eyes, half opened her lips, made no remark, but at length held out a slightly trembling hand, which I promptly took. Making use of my support to spring to her feet, she tripped lightly across the floor. Within a few minutes, we were both on horseback, and riding out of the courtyard.

We reached the end of the avenue without having exchanged a word. You may be sure that I felt how awkward, stiff, and absurd this silence was, on my side, at least; but, as often happens at junctures where our eloquence is most

desirable, I felt as if I could find absolutely nothing to say. In vain did I torture my brain for some suitable topic, the more I tried, the more hopeless did my endeavour become. Besides, I was disturbed by new and strange reflections; in spite of myself, I could not help following out the unexpected train of thought suggested by Madame de Malquet's singular remarks. I asked myself how far they were justified, and in that case how far she had been wise in her advice. I remembered the haughty, wilful, capricious spirit of the young lady by my side, and saw her present sad and subdued looks. All this disturbed and vaguely touched me. The abyss between me and such a character is just as great as ever; but though the distance still exists, our estrangement has entirely vanished.

Madame de Palme, who was ignorant of my secret meditations, and would, perhaps, hardly have relished the most charitable portion of them, grew wearied at length of a silence which was, to say the least of it, embarrassing. "Shall we quicken our pace a little?" said she, suddenly.

"Yes, let us," returned I, and off we set at a gallop, which was a great relief to me.

But we were forced, whether we liked it or not, to slacken our pace as we reached the head of the winding path leading down into the valley where the ruins are. The care required in guiding our horses down this difficult descent served, for a few minutes longer, as a pretext for my silence; but when we gained the level of the valley, I felt myself obliged to speak, and was about to commence with some commonplace remark, when Madame de Palme came to the rescue: "You are said to be very witty, I believe?"

"Madame," replied I with a laugh, "you can judge for yourself."

"Hardly yet, even were I capable of judging, which you scarcely credit. Oh, do not attempt to deny it! After the

conversation I chanced to overhear the other evening, it is perfectly useless—”

“Madame, I have fallen into so many mistakes respecting you, that you may easily account for my pitiable confusion.”

“In what respects were you mistaken?”

“In all, I believe.”

“You do not feel quite sure. Own, at least, that I am not a bad woman”—

“With all my heart, madame!”

“You say so cordially, and I believe you are sincere. I don’t suppose you are a bad man, either, and yet you have behaved cruelly towards me.”

“It is quite true.”

“What sort of man can you be?” resumed the Little Countess in her curt abrupt tones. “I can’t make you out. What entitles you to look down on me? Suppose I were actually guilty of all the intrigues laid to my charge, what could it signify to you? Are you a saint or a reformer? Have you never had a mistress? Are you more virtuous than other men of your age and standing? What right have you to despise me? Tell me that.”

“Madame, if I had to blush for the sentiments you attribute to me, I should reply that no one, either of your sex or mine, ever took his own morality as the standard by which to judge his own opinions or for his judgment of others; our judgment is correct and our conduct faulty; and men are generally so inconsistent as to disapprove of the very failings they themselves encourage and foster. But I, for my part, endeavour to be on my guard against a puritanism which is as ridiculous in a man, as it is sinful in a christian. As to the conversation which by an unlucky chance you overheard, and in which my expressions, as usual, were stronger than my opinions, I feel that I can never expiate my offence, but pray allow me to give some explanation of it. Every

one has his own views of this life, and ours are so completely different that we felt an antipathy for each other at first sight. This frame of mind, which, on one side at least, madame, was destined to be strangely modified by further acquaintance, made me give way to spleen and thoughtless attacks; no doubt I have made you suffer from my violent language, but, if you will believe me, I have suffered far more myself since I recognised its complete injustice."

No reply was made to this apology of mine, which was more sincere than lucid. We had just ridden through the abbey chapel, and suddenly found ourselves amongst the last ranks of the cavalcade. Our appearance was the signal for a low murmur throughout the serried ranks of the huntsmen. Madame de Palme was at once surrounded by a merry troop, who appeared to congratulate her upon having won her wager. She received these congratulations with an indifferent pouting air, touched her horse with the whip and rode on to the front to plunge into the forest.

M. de Malouet, meanwhile, had received me with more than his usual affability, and without making any direct allusion to the incident which had brought me, against my will, to the hunt, omitted no attention that could make me forget the slight annoyance. Presently the dogs started a stag, and I followed them close, being anything but insensible to the zest of this manly sport, though it is not indispensable to my happiness.

The dogs lost the scent two or three times, and in the end the stag got away. Towards four o'clock we turned our horses' heads in the direction of the château. When we crossed the valley on our way back, the waning light was already defining the outlines of the trees and the line of hills more clearly against the sky: a melancholy shade was descending over the woods, and the grass in the meadows was frosted by a white mist, while a thicker fog indicated the

windings of the little stream. While I was absorbed in contemplating this scene, which recalled happier days, Madame de Palme suddenly appeared by my side.

"I think, upon reflection," observed she with her usual abruptness, "that my ignorance and want of mental gifts are what you despise, far more than my alleged frivolity of manner. You care less about virtue than intellect, don't you?"

"Not at all," said I, laughing, "that is not the case in the least. To begin with, the word 'despise' must be left out of the question, we have nothing to do with it; and then I scarcely believe in your ignorance, and not in the least in your want of mind. In conclusion, I see nothing to prize above virtue, when we meet with it, which is but seldom. But I cannot understand, madame, your attaching any importance to my opinion. The secret of my likes and dislikes is perfectly simple; I have the highest respect for virtue, as I say, but mine is limited to a deep consciousness of a few essential duties which I fulfil as well as I can, so that I could hardly exact more from any one else. As to intellect, I own that I prize it highly, and life seems to me too serious a matter to be looked upon as a perpetual dance, from the cradle to the grave. Besides, the productions of intellect, especially works of art, are my greatest objects of interest, so that I naturally enjoy being able to talk about them. That is all."

"And must our lips be always full of spiritual ecstasies, cemeteries, and the Venus of Milo, to rank in your esteem as thoughtful women, with some good taste? As to the rest, you are right,—I never think at all; if I were to think for a minute, I believe I should go mad, my head would split. And now, what were you meditating here, in the cell of this old convent?"

"My thoughts were a good deal of you," said I gaily, "on



the evening of the day when you chased me so rudely, and I cursed you heartily."

"Of course you did." Here she began to laugh, looked about her a little, and resumed :—"What a lovely valley! Such a charming evening! And do you curse me now?"

"Now I wish with all my heart that I could do anything to make you happy."

"And I wish the same by you," said she simply.

I replied merely by a bow, and a short silence ensued.

"If I were a man," resumed Madame de Palme suddenly, "I believe I should turn hermit."

"What a pity that would be!"

"Don't you feel astonished at the notion?"

"No, madame."

"Own that you would never be surprised by anything I did. You think me capable of anything,—anything at all, perhaps of falling in love with you?"

"Why not? Extremes meet! I have fallen in love with you by this time, so you had better follow my example."

"Will you let me think it over?"

"Not for long!"

"As long as I need, and meantime we will be friends."

"If we are friends, there is nothing to wait for," said I, frankly, extending my hand to the Little Countess. I felt her grasp it with some reserve, and the conversation ended. We had reached the top of the hill, night had closed in, and we rode straight on to the château.

As I left my room to come down to dinner, I encountered Madame de Malouet in the corridor :—"Well," said she, laughing, "did you obey my injunctions?"

"To the letter, madame."

"Did you show yourself vanquished?"

"Yes, madame."

"That is right. You will both be easy now."

"I hope so," replied I.

The evening passed away without any further incident. I was glad to take the opportunity of paying Madame de Palme a few little attentions, unasked. She left the dancers several times to come up to me and make a few kindly jests as they occurred to her, and when I retired, followed me to the door with a cordial look and smile.

And now I want you, my friend, to disentangle the precise sense and meaning of this story. You will perhaps declare what I wish, that only a romantic imagination could make this vulgar episode of every-day life assume the proportions of an event; but if you see in the facts I have related the slightest germ of danger, the slightest element of any serious complication, tell me; I will break off the engagement by which I should be detained here another ten days, and leave at once.

I am not the least bit in love with Madame de Palme; I neither could nor would love her. My opinion respecting her has altered considerably; I shall look on her henceforward as a good little woman. She is feather-brained and will be so always; her conduct is far better than her reputation, though perhaps it may fall short of her own estimate, and she has a good honest heart. I feel for her friendship and an almost paternal affection, but this is not likely to grow into anything further; we are as far asunder as the poles. The idea of becoming her husband would seem to me absolutely ludicrous, and that of becoming her lover horrible, you can sympathise with my feelings on this point. On her side, I think I see a faint caprice, but not a shadow of passion. Now that she has ranged me on her shelves with her other specimens, I think, with Madame de Malouet, that she will be satisfied. Still, I want to have your opinion.

I feel it necessary, Paul, in bringing my perplexities to a

close, in which certain passages may exhale a suspicious odour, to remind you, my friend, that I am no conceited coxcomb. I have told you the simple truth. Self-conceit does not consist, I imagine, in perceiving that a woman squeezes your hand as she wrings it, but in dwelling with pleasure on such a common kind of success, which has nothing to do with merit. I can never forget an old wrinkled, seamed, disfigured, ugly, stupid provincial actor telling me that a superb woman had said to him one evening: "You are not a man, but a god!" I have not the slightest doubt it was true. Yes, thank heaven, the ugliest of mortals, our friend G— of the *Institut*, has had the pleasure of hearing more than once from a woman's lips that he was as handsome as Apollo. Such things have ever been, and that is why the term coxcomb has always been held synonymous with fool. Every blind man can find a dog to follow him without priding himself upon it.

Good-night.

## CHAPTER VII.

*October 7th.*

DEAR Paul, I sympathise most heartily with your grief, but allow me to assure you, from the very details you give in your letter, that your dear mother's illness is attended by no anxious symptoms. It is one of those painful, but not dangerous crises, to which, as you know, she is almost invariably subject at the approach of winter. Have patience then, and pray take courage.

Without the formal expression of a wish on your part, I should never venture, my friend, to intrude my small miseries on your serious anxieties. As your good judgment and kindness foresaw, I required not advice, but consolation,

when your letter came to hand. My mind is ill at ease, and what is worse, my conscience too : and yet I thought I was doing my duty. Did I fail to understand it? You shall judge. Heavens ! Sometimes I am so stupid as to envy those whom I see yielding without a scruple or a struggle, by mere brute instinct, to whatever attracts or repels them ! How conscience is tormented by a naturally honest mind, when not guided by certain principles, or sustained by a positive faith !

I take up the thread of the story of my relations with Madame de Palme where I left off in my previous letter. On the day following our explanations, I was most careful to maintain the friendly footing which seemed to have been established between us, and which, to my mind, constituted the sole kind of relation desirable, or even possible. She seemed to me just as lively and sparkling as ever that day, though I thought I noticed that her eye and voice softened and became graver whenever she addressed me ; but on subsequent days, though I had never deviated from the line of conduct I had marked out for myself, I could not but see that Madame de Palme had lost some of her gaiety, and that her calm face was disturbed by some vague pre-occupation. I saw that the dancers were surprised by her absent ways : she followed the giddy maze, but had ceased to direct it. She suddenly pleaded fatigue in the middle of a waltz, left her partner without the slightest ceremony, and sat brooding and pensive in a corner. If the chair next mine was empty, she flung herself down in it, played with her fan, and commenced a singular and disjointed conversation, such as the following :—

“If I can’t turn hermit, I can become a nun. What should you say if you were to see me enter a convent to-morrow ?”

“I should say that you would come out the day after.”

"Have you no confidence in my resolutions?"

"Not when they are foolish."

"According to you, I am incapable of forming any others!"

"According to me, you waltz splendidly. To waltz as you do is an art, and almost a virtue."

"Do you flatter your friends?"

"I am not flattering you. I never use a word that I have not weighed, and that does not express what I really think. I am by nature serious, madame."

"You scarcely seem so with me. I believe you are determined to make me hate laughing as much as I used to love it."

"I don't understand you."

"What do you think of me this evening?"

"You look dazzling."

"That is an extravagant expression. I know I am not handsome."

"I did not say you were handsome, but you are very graceful."

"You are right there. It must be true, for I feel that I am. The Malabar widow is really handsome."

"Yes; I should like to see her on the funeral pile."

"That you might throw yourself on it too?"

"Just so."

"Shall you be leaving soon?"

"Next week, I think."

"Shall you come and see me in Paris?"

"If you will allow me—"

"No, I shall not allow you."

"And pray why not?"

"Because, to begin with, I don't think I shall go back to Paris."

"That is a good reason. And where then will you go, madame?"

"I don't know. How would you like to go off on a walking-tour somewhere, just you and I together?"

"Very much, of course. Shall we go?"

And so on, and so on. I need not weary you, my friend, with the details of a dozen similar dialogues for which Madame de Palme evidently sought opportunity during the next four days; there was a more and more marked effort on her part to throw aside commonplaces and to give a more intimate character to our conversations, and on mine an equal determination to keep to ordinary small talk and the jargon of society. This she perceived, often laughing at it, and sometimes appearing vexed, in her surprise at so soon losing the serious tone she tried to assume with me.

These new tactics had little chance of escaping the notice of the envious or jealous persons who watch every one of the Little Countess' movements, and all the more closely because of the childlike frankness and simplicity which characterises them. She could not help occasionally noticing the irksomeness which I felt under the curious glances thus attracted to us.—"I am compromising you," said she; "I will go!"—While protesting, I made no effort to detain her, for you know me well enough, Paul, to be sure that I was sincere in my reserve; my system was to keep Madame de Palme as much at a distance as possible, without ever hurting her feelings. Even now I don't know what better course I could have taken, though this one has not been so successful as I hoped. If I had to submit myself to any other judgment than yours, I might allege in my own defence, that sometimes I had to exercise all my self-command, not to reject the estimate formed by the world of the sort of triumph which seemed within my grasp, but to suppress the secret stirrings of a heart less firm than my brain under this young lady's charming grace and kindness.

And now I come to the scene which was to end this pain-

ful struggle, and give me the melancholy proof of its vanity. As a farewell entertainment to their daughter, whose husband is recalled to his post, M. and Madame Malouet gave a grand ball yesterday, to which all the country, for thirty miles round, was invited. Towards ten o'clock, the suite of rooms on the ground-floor was crowded, and the dresses, lights, and flowers, formed altogether a dazzling spectacle.

As I endeavoured to make my way into the grand drawing-room, I found myself facing Madame de Malouet, who drew me a little aside:—"My dear sir," said she, "things are taking a wrong turn."

"Why," said I, "is there anything new?"

"I scarcely know, but be on your guard. Things are not going on as they should—I place implicit confidence in you, dear sir; you will not belie it, will you?" Her voice betrayed some emotion, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Madame," I replied, "you may rely upon me; but I ought to have left a week since."

"Bless me, who could foresee anything of this sort?—Hush!"

I turned round and perceived Madame de Palme coming out of the room, while the crowd opened a passage for her with that timid eagerness and sort of terror generally produced in our sex by the supreme elegance of feminine majesty. There is a magic charm in these young queens of the evening which tells upon the proudest soul, when we see their haughty brows and sparkling eyes surrounded by every possible splendour, as they tread triumphantly across their exquisite though bounded domain. For the first time I thought Madame de Palme handsome; a strange expression such as I had never seen, a kind of exultation, sparkled in her eyes and transformed her face.

"Do you like my dress?" said she. I murmured something affirmative, but my assent was self-evident to the quick

eye of a woman. "I was looking for you," she went on to say, "in order to show you the conservatory, come and see, it is a perfect fairy scene."

She took my arm and we moved towards the door of the conservatory which opened out of the other end of the drawing-room, thus extending the brilliant scene as far as the park, in the midst of a thousand fragrant tropical plants and creepers. Whilst we were admiring the effect of the lustres, which sparkled in the midst of this grand exotic flora, like the brilliant constellations of some other hemisphere, several gentlemen came to claim Madame de Palme's hand for a waltz: she declined, though I was unselfish enough to second their entreaties.

"We seem to have changed parts," said she: "I am the one to detain you, while you try to get rid of me."

"Heaven forbid! but I fear that your kindness is leading you to deprive yourself, for my sake, of a pleasure which you are fond of,—and which is fond of you."

"No! I am quite aware that I am following you, and that you are trying to make your escape. It may seem absurd in the eyes of the world, but what care I? This evening, for once, I mean to enjoy myself in my own way. I forbid you to spoil my pleasure; I feel perfectly happy. I have all that I long for; lovely flowers and good music, and a friend by my side. The only dark spot in the blue sky is, that I feel less sure of the friend than of the music and flowers."

"You are quite mistaken there."

"Then explain your conduct, once for all. Why will you never talk seriously to me? Why are you so obstinately resolved never to say a word that indicates confidence, intimacy, in short, friendship?"

"Just reflect a moment, madame; what would it lead to?"

"What need you care? Let it lead where it will. It is



rather amusing that you should feel more anxiety on that score than I do !”

“Come now, what would you think, if I were to pay court to you ?”

“I am not asking you to pay court to me,” returned she promptly.

“No, madame ; but my conversation would be sure to tend that way, if it ever ceased to lose its trivial character. Well then ! Own that there is one man in the world who would incur your contempt by paying court to you, and that I am that man. I am not going to say that I feel pleased to find myself in such a situation ; but being there, I cannot forget it.”

“You have a great deal of sense !”

“Say rather, madame, a great deal of courage.”

She shook her head dubiously, and resumed after a moment's silence :—“Do you know that you have been speaking to me as if I were a depraved character ?”

“Madame ?”

“I mean what I say. You imagine that the only motive I can attribute to any man paying court to me, is that of wishing to make me his mistress. This might be true of a depraved woman, but I am pure ; you may not believe me, but I speak the truth, as in the sight of God. He knows my heart and life, and I pray to Him oftener than you may think. He has kept me from sinning until now, and I hope He will do so always ; but there is one thing which does not rest with Him alone.”—Here she paused for a moment, and then added resolutely : “It depends a good deal upon you.”

“Upon me, madame ?”

“I have allowed you to acquire, I know not how, I'm sure I don't, a great influence over my future life. Will you exert your influence ? That is the question.”

“By what right—in what capacity could I do so, madame ?” asked I deliberately, in a tone of chilling reserve.

"What," exclaimed she, in a low energetic voice, "do you ask me that?—What a humiliation! Oh, you are too hard!" And, disengaging my arm, she returned to the drawing-room at once.

I stood for some time debating what course to take. At first I wanted to follow Madame de Paline and assure her that she had mistaken, as indeed she had, the meaning of my answer; as conveyed in the question which had offended her. She seemed to have applied this answer to some predominating idea in her own mind, which I scarcely understood, but on which her own words had thrown more light than she imagined; but, upon reflection, I shrank from the fresh and alarming explanation I should inevitably provoke. I made up my mind to bear the most vexatious interpretations that might be put upon my attitude and language, and silently to swallow the bitterness with which my heart had been filled by this scene.

I left the conservatory, and wandered into the garden to escape from the noise of the ball, which I found very distasteful. The night was cold, though fine. A sad instinct led me beyond the belt of light cast around the chateau by its brilliantly illuminated windows. I strode on towards a thick mass of shade formed by a double avenue of pines which separates the garden from the park, and is crossed by a rustic bridge thrown over the stream. I was entering the cloistered shades of this gloomy avenue, when I was stopped by a hand laid upon my arm, and an abrupt broken voice, which I could not but recognise, said:—"I must speak to you!"

"I entreat of you, madame! For the love of heaven!—What are you doing! You will lose your good name!—go back to the house, come, let me take you!"

I tried to seize her arm, but she instantly freed herself. "I want to speak to you," she exclaimed, "I have made

up my mind—Oh, how stupid I am, in beginning! You must think worse of me than ever? And yet there has never been anything,—I am speaking the truth before heaven! You are the first man for whom I ever forgot—all that I forget now! Yes, the very first! No man has ever heard a tender word from my lips, and you will not believe me!”

I took both her hands in mine:—“I believe you, I swear—I swear that I esteem and respect you as I would my own daughter; but listen to me, I entreat you! Do not brave this cruel world so openly, go back to the ball-room, I promise to join you there presently; but, for heaven’s sake, do not peril your good name!”

The unfortunate child burst into tears, and I felt her stagger; I assisted her to a bench near at hand and made her sit down. I stood before her with one of her hands in mine. All was dark around us; I looked into space and listened, with a vague stupor, to the clear regular murmur of the stream beneath the pine-trees, the convulsive sob which heaved the poor creature’s breast, and the odious strains of merriment occasionally wafted towards us from the band. It was one of those moments we can never forget.

At length she recovered, and all her firmness seemed to return after this explosion of grief. “Sir,” said she, rising and withdrawing her hand, “don’t feel anxious about my reputation. The world is accustomed to my follies. Besides, I have taken precautions to prevent this being noticed. Not that I care much: you are the only man whose esteem I value, and unhappily the only one whose contempt I have incurred. It is very hard, but something ought to tell you how little I deserve it!”

“Madamo!”

“Listen,—oh that the Almighty would convince you, for this is a solemn hour in my life. From the first glance you cast upon me the day when I came upon you as you were

drawing that old chapel,—from the hour of that glance, I have been yours. I have never loved any one else, I shall never love any one but you! Will you make me your wife? I am worthy,—I say so solemnly, in the presence of that God who sees us!”

“Dear madame,—dear child,—your kindness, your affection, touch my inmost heart; but pray be calm,—let me appeal to my reason.”

“Oh, sir, if your heart speaks, listen to it! I must not be judged by reason! Alas, I feel that you still doubt me and my past life. Oh, how the opinion of the world, which I have always despised and trampled under foot, is avenging itself now! It is killing me!”

“No, madame, you are deceiving yourself; but what could I offer you in return for what you are willing to sacrifice to me,—the habits, tastes, and pleasures of your whole life?”

“But I hate my life! Do you think I should ever regret it? Do you think I might some day again become the woman I have been,—the madcap you have known? You believe it, and what can I do to alter your belief? And yet I feel sure that I shall never cause you this grief or any other—no, never! I have read in your eyes of a new world which I never knew before, a higher and nobler world of which I had no conception, and outside of which I can no longer live!—Oh! you must feel that I am speaking the truth!”

“Yes, madame, it is the truth,—the truth of the present moment,—a moment of feverish exaltation; but this new world of which you have such a vague conception, the ideal world where you expect to take refuge from some passing disappointment, could never fulfil your expectations. Deception, regret, and sadness would await you, and not you only. I know not whether there is a man alive with a heart and mind

noble enough to make you relish the new life for which you long, and to retain the semi-divine character with which your imagination invests it; but this task, sweet as it would be, I feel to be beyond my powers; I should be a fool, nay, a wretch, to attempt it."

"Is this your final decision? Will it not alter on reflection?"

"Never."

"Then farewell, sir. Miserable creature that I am!—Farewell!" And seizing my hand, she grasped it convulsively, and disappeared.

As soon as she was gone, I sank down on the bench where she had been sitting. Then, dear Paul, my strength gave way altogether. I hid my face in my hands, and wept like a child. Thank heaven she did not return!

I was obliged at length to summon all my courage in order to show myself for an instant in the ball-room. Nothing seemed to indicate that my absence had been noticed, or received any annoying interpretation. Madame de Palmé was dancing, and displaying a sort of feverish gaiety. Soon there was a general move to the supper-room, and I took advantage of the confusion of the moment to retire.

This morning, I asked to speak to Madame de Malouet in private. I felt that I ought to tell her everything. She betrayed much distress, but no surprise, on hearing me. "I guessed something of the sort," said she. "I never slept all night. I believe you to have acted with discretion and honesty. Yes, you have done your duty, and yet it seems very hard. The detestable feature of our social life is, that it creates unnatural ways and passions, unexpected situations, undefinable distinctions, which strangely complicate our duty and obscure the straight path which ought always to lie plainly and unmistakeably before our eyes. And now I presume you wish to leave us?"

"Yes, madame."

"So you shall ; but wait two or three days longer. This will prevent your departure from assuming the aspect of a flight, which, after what has been noticed, might seem absurd and even be prejudicial. I ask this sacrifice as a personal favour. We are all to dine at Madame de Breuille's to-day, and I will undertake to make your excuses. This will relieve you for one day at least. To-morrow, we will do the best we can for you. The day after, you can go."

I agreed to this. So then, dear Paul, we may hope to meet soon. I feel so solitary and deserted ! I long to clasp your firm and loyal hand, and to hear you say, you did right !

## CHAPTER VIII.

*Du Rozel, October 10th.*

HERE I am, back in my cell, my friend,—why did I ever leave it ? Never did any heart within these cold walls beat more anxiously than mine ! I am not going to curse our poor reason, our wisdom, our morality and human philosophy : are not these the best and noblest of our possessions ? And yet, how vain they are ! What doubtful guides and frail supports !

Listen to the sad story I have to tell. Yesterday, thanks to Madame de Malouet, I passed the whole day and evening by myself at the château. I was therefore completely undisturbed. Towards midnight, I heard the carriages returning, and, soon after, all was quiet. It was nearly three o'clock in the morning, I believe, when I was aroused from the kind of feverish slumber which has visited me instead of proper sleep during the last few nights, by the sound of a door not far off which some one seemed to be opening or closing cautiously in the courtyard. I cannot tell what strange and

sudden connection of ideas made so ordinary an incident attract my attention and disturb my mind. Starting up from the chair in which I had been dozing, I went to the window, and clearly distinguished a man cautiously stealing away towards the avenue. It was easy to guess that he had just come out by the door which gives access to the wing of the château adjoining the library. This part of the house contains several rooms reserved for chance guests, and I knew they were all unoccupied at the time,—unless Madame de Palme, as often happened, might have taken up her quarters for the night in the room always set apart for her use in this wing.

You may guess the strange idea that flitted across my mind. First, I repudiated it as a horribly mad notion, and then, as my tolerably wide experience recalled facts which I had observed that seemed to strengthen it, I entertained it with a sort of cynical irony, and felt almost ready to admit it as an odious but decisive *dénouement*. The first rays of dawn found me a prey to these mental tortures, racking my memory, and childishly reviewing the most minute circumstances that might tend to confirm or assuage my suspicions. At length excessive fatigue overwhelmed me for two hours, at the end of which I felt my senses under better control. I could not doubt, on awaking, the reality of the apparition which I had seen in the middle of the night, but I thought I might have interpreted it in mad haste, and have given it the most improbable explanation. Then, even supposing my worst presentiments to be well founded, I might indeed feel deeply grieved at such a sad and shameless proof of the mobile and perverse heart of this woman; but I had forfeited all right to seem offended; the most ordinary feeling of dignity must compel me to appear at least indifferent. If it were possible that revonge on me had been the motive, I would let no one read the success of the plot upon my face. As to my

sufferings, I told myself again and again that the sharpest pangs would soon be blunted by my departure.

I came downstairs at half-past ten, as usual. Madame de Palme was in the drawing-room, so she had evidently slept at the château. But the mere sight of her was enough to banish the slightest shade of suspicion. She was calmly conversing in the centre of a group, and greeted me with her usual sweet smile. I felt a great weight lifted from my mind. The tortures from which I was relieved were of so bitter and painful a nature that I looked back almost fondly to my original sorrow, freed from the scandalous complications by which I had feared it was aggravated. Never had my heart rendered more tender and pathetic homage to this young lady. I felt grateful to her for restoring purity to my sad memories.

The afternoon was to be spent in a ride on the sea-shore. In the gladness of my heart after the anxieties of the night, I was ready to yield to M. de Malouet's entreaties, when he pleaded my approaching departure as a reason for accompanying them in this expedition. Our cavalcade, which was recruited as usual by some of the young people in the neighbourhood, left the courtyard about two o'clock. We had been riding along in great spirits for some minutes, and I as merry as the rest, when Madame de Palme suddenly rode up by my side.

"I am going to do something base," said she; "I gave my word, certainly,—but I am stifling!" I looked at her; the wild expression of her face and eyes struck me with sudden terror. "Well!" resumed she, in a voice I can never forget, "it is all your doing; I have lost my good name!"—She urged her horse on and rode forward, leaving me overwhelmed; the blow had come with greater force because I had lost my fear of it, and it proved even keener than I had ever anticipated. There had been no trace of insolence or hardness in



the poor creature's voice ; it was the accent of despair, a cry of anguish and timid reproach,—everything that could add the conflicting elements of deep pity and an uneasy conscience to the tortures of tarnished and injured love which preyed upon me.

As soon as I had gathered strength to look about me, I felt astonished at my blindness. Among those who dance attendance most assiduously on Madame de Palme there is a M. de Maunterne, whose aversion to me, though restrained within the bounds of common politeness, often seemed to conceal almost absolute hostility. M. de Maunterne is a man of about my own age, tall and fair, looking more robust than distinguished, with regular features, but a heavy, insipid expression of face. He is quite a man of the world, has plenty of assurance and little talent. His manner and conduct during this fatal ride would have shown me at once, had I thought of observing them, that he fancied he had nothing henceforward to fear from any rival for Madame de Palme's favour. He assumed the lead in every scene in which she took part ; paid her attentions with a discreet and self-important air ; affected a low tone when he addressed her, and, in short, neglected nothing that might apprise the company of his good fortune. All his labour in this direction, however, was completely thrown away ; our little world, having exhausted its malice over imaginary offences, seems so far to refuse to see what is going on under its very eyes.

As to myself, my friend, I can hardly describe the chaos of thoughts and emotions which raged within me. Perhaps the predominant sentiment was that of hatred towards this man, an eternal, implacable hatred. Yet I felt more shocked and grieved than surprised at her choice having fallen upon him ; he was the first who came in her way, and had been accepted with a kind of disdainful indifference, as a man picks up any lethal weapon, when he has once determined upon suicide.

My feelings towards her you may divine ; there was no anger, but the deepest sadness, the tenderest compassion, a vague remorse, and, above all, a furious, passionate regret ! At length I discovered how much I had loved her ! I could scarcely comprehend the reasons which, two days before, had seemed to me so strong and imperious as to erect an insurmountable barrier between her and myself. All these obstacles of the past vanished before the present abyss, which now appeared to be the only one—the one impossible to remove, the only obstacle that had ever existed !—It was a strange thing ! I saw what was impossible and irreparable as plainly as I did the sun above, and yet I could not accept it, nor become resigned to the fact ! I saw this woman as much lost to me as if the grave had closed over her, and yet I could not give her up !

Then I formed wild projects and senseless resolutions ; I thought I would force a quarrel on M. de Mauterne and oblige him to fight me there and then—I felt I should have felled him to the ground ! Then I thought I would carry her off, marry her, and take her disgraced after having refused her while pure !—I was actually tempted to commit this madness ! I could only restrain myself by telling myself again and again that disgust and despair would be the only fruits that could result from the union of a tarnished name and a blood-stained hand.—Oh Paul, how intensely I suffered !

Throughout the ride, Madame de Palme displayed a feverish excitement which found a safety-valve in mad feats of horsemanship. Every now and then I heard bursts of forced merriment which sounded in my ears like the saddest of wails. She spoke to me once again as she passed : “ I horrify you, don’t I ? ” she said. I shook my head and cast down my eyes without speaking.

Towards four o’clock we returned to the château. I was

on the way to my own room, when a confused sound of voices, shrieks, and hurried footsteps beneath the portico made my heart cease beating for the moment. I rushed downstairs, and learnt that Madame de Palme had just sunk down in a violent fit of hysterics. They had carried her into the drawing-room. I could hear Madame de Malouet's grave sweet voice within, mingling with a wail like that of a sick child. I rushed away.

I decided on quitting this miserable place at once. Nothing could have detained me another instant. Your letter had been put into my hands when I came in, and it furnished a good pretext for my sudden departure. Our close friendship is known here, and I said you wanted me to join you within four and twenty hours. I had taken care to send to the nearest town three days before for a carriage and horses, so as to be ready for any emergency. It only required a few minutes to put my things together; I told the driver to go on and wait for me at the end of the avenue, while I took leave of the family.

M. de Malouet appeared to have no suspicion of the real state of the case; the good old man seemed touched when I thanked him for his kindness, and the affection he has shown me has been really unusual, and out of all proportion to our short acquaintance. I can scarcely speak less highly of M. de Breuille, and regret the caricature which I once laid before you as a portrait of this noble character.

Madame de Malouet chose to go a little way further with me down the avenue than her husband; I felt her hand tremble on my arm as she gave me some trifling commissions to execute in Paris. Just as we were about to part and I pressed her hand warmly, she gently detained me: "Well, sir," said she, almost below her breath, "Heaven has not smiled on our endeavours!"

"Madame, our hearts are open to One above, who must

have read our good intentions. He sees what I suffer, and I humbly hope for His 'pardon.'

"Never doubt it, oh never!" resumed she in a contrite tone. "But what of her? 'Her! Oh, that poor child!"

"Have pity on her, madame. Do not abandon her. Farewell!"

I turned away hastily and drove off; but instead of going at once towards the town, ordered the driver to take me as far as the top of the hill on the road towards the abbey: then I begged him to drive on to the town alone and pick me up early next morning at the same place. I cannot account to you, dear friend, for the strange and irresistible temptation I felt to pass one more night in this solitude, where but a short time ago, alas, I felt so peaceful and so happy!

So here I am in my cell. How dark and cold and melancholy it looks! The sky, too, is overcast. In spite of the season, I had seen nothing but summer days and nights since I came into this part of the country. This evening, an icy autumnal hurricane has rushed down the valley; the wind is whistling among the ruins and detaching some fragments which fall heavily to the ground. The rain is pelting against my windows. I feel as if it were raining tears!

Tears! My heart is full of tears, though not a single one will come into my eyes! And yet I have been praying, praying again and again to God,—not to that unapproachable God whom we vainly imagine beyond the stars and far away from our earth,—but to the only God who can help the afflicted, the God of my childhood,—the God of this poor woman!

I will think of nothing but my return to you. The day after to-morrow, dear friend, and perhaps even before this letter——

Come, Paul ! If you can leave your mother, come, I implore, to my aid. I am struck by the hand of God !

I was writing the line where I broke off, when my ear seemed suddenly to detect a sound like the cry of a human voice in the midst of the raging tempest. I rushed to the window, leaning out to descry what I could in the surrounding darkness, and there, on the black uneven ground, I caught sight of something shapeless, that looked like a white bundle. At the same instant a moan reached my ear more distinctly. A glimpse of the terrible truth darted across me like a sharp blade. I groped my way to the door of the mill, and near the threshold I saw a horse standing with an empty side-saddle. I ran to the other side of the ruins, and in the enclosure beneath the window of my cell, which still retains some traces of the monks' burial-ground, I found the unfortunate creature. There she sat, bowed down on an old tombstone, shivering from head to foot under the torrents of chilling rain poured down by the pitiless sky on her thin evening dress. I took hold of both her hands and tried to raise her. "My poor child, what have you done ? Poor thing !"

"Yes, poor indeed," murmured she in the faintest of voices.

"But you will be killing yourself !"

"All the better,—far better !"

"You must not remain here !—Come !"—I had seen that she had no strength left to stand.—"Merciful Lord ! Gracious Father, help, what shall I do ?—What will become of you now ? What did you want with me ?"

She made no answer. She trembled, and her teeth chattered. I lifted her in my arms and carried her away. Our thoughts travel fast in such moments. There was no possibility of removing her from this valley, where a carriage cannot enter. Nothing could be done to save her honour, I

must think only of her life. I soon mounted the steps leading to my cell, and placed her in a chair near the fire, which I hastily rekindled, and then I called up my host and hostess. I gave some vague and confused explanation to the miller's wife; how much of it she understood, I cannot say, but she was a woman, and had a tender heart. She did all she could for Madame de Palme. Her husband rode off at once, bearing the following note from me to Madame de Malouet:—

“Madame,—She is here, and dying. I implore and conjure you by the God of mercy to come and soothe and comfort her; you are the only one in the world to whom she can now look for words of kind forgiveness.

“Be so good as to say to Madame de Pontbrian whatever you may think necessary.”

She asked for me. I came back, and found her still sitting in front of the fire. She had refused to be laid in the bed made ready for her. On seeing me,—by a strange feminine instinct,—her first thought was of the peasant costume for which she had just exchanged her own clothes, which were saturated with wet and covered with mud. She began to laugh as she pointed to it; but the laugh soon became hysterical, and I found it difficult to quiet her. I sat down by her side; she could not get warm; she was dreadfully feverish, and her eyes sparkled. I urged her to take the complete rest which alone could do her any good.

“What good?” said she, “I am not ill. It is not fever or cold that is killing me, but the thoughts burning here,” striking her forehead; “it is shame—your contempt and hatred which are now so justly deserved!”

My heart was ready to burst, Paul; I told her all, my passion, my regret and remorse! I covered her trembling hands, her icy brow, and damp hair with kisses—I poured out all the tenderness, pity and adoration of a man's soul

into her poor bruised heart, and she knew that I loved her, she could not doubt it !

She listened with rapture. "You need not pity me now," said she. "I never felt so happy in all my life. I have not deserved this—I have nothing more to wish, nothing better to hope for—I shall have nothing to regret."

She has fallen into a light sleep. Her lips are half open, and on them rests a pure and peaceful smile ; but every now and then a terrible convulsion seizes her, and alters her face sadly.—I write as I watch by her side :—

Madame de Malonet has just arrived with her husband. She has fulfilled my expectations, her tone and words are those of a mother. She was so thoughtful as to bring a doctor with her. The invalid is now lying in a comfortable bed, and cared for by loving hands. I feel more at ease, though frightful delirium ensued as soon as she awoke.

Madame de Pontbrian positively declined to come to her niece. What an excellent christian ! I was right too in my estimate of her.

I consider it my duty not to set foot again within the cell, which Madame de Malonet never leaves. M. de Malonet's face alarms me, though he assures me that the doctor has not yet given his opinion.

The doctor has just left. I had an opportunity of speaking to him. He told me it was inflammation of the lungs, complicated by brain fever.

"It is of a very serious nature, I suppose?"

"Most serious."

"But is the danger immediate?"

"I will tell you to-night. The fever is so high that it cannot last long. The crisis must pass or nature succumb."

"You have no hope?"

He glanced upward<sup>^</sup> and took his leave.

I cannot describe my feelings, dear friend ! Blow has fallen upon blow ! I have been struck down as by a thunderbolt.

5 P.M.

They have been sending off in all haste for the curé whom I have often seen at the château. He is a friend of Madame de Malouet's, a simple, benevolent old man. He came out of the sick-chamber for a moment, but I durst not question him. I don't know what is going on. I fear to learn, and yet my ear is listening to catch the slightest and most insignificant sounds ; the closing of the door, the tread of a rapid footstep on the stairs fills me with terror. And yet—so soon—it is impossible !

Paul ! my friend, my brother ! where are you ? All is over ! I saw the doctor and the curé go downstairs an hour ago, followed by M. de Malonet. "Go up," said he to me. "Come, have courage, show yourself a man." I entered the cell, where Madame de Malouet alone remained, she was kneeling by the bedside, and beckoned me to come up to it.

I gazed on her whose sufferings were so soon to end. A few hours had imprinted all the ravages of death on her lovely face ; but life and thought still sparkled in her eyes, and she recognised me at once. "Sir," said she, addressing me ; and then after a pause : "George, I loved you dearly. Forgive me for having poisoned your life by such sad memories !"

I sank on my knees ; I tried to speak, but could not ; my scalding tears fell on her hand, which was already as dead and cold as marble. "And you too, madame," resumed she, "forgive the grief and pain I have caused you !"

"My child !" replied the old lady, "I bless you with all my heart !"



Then there was silence, suddenly broken by one deep, long-drawn sigh ! Oh, that last sigh, the last sob of mortal grief, was heard and accepted on high !

It was heard,—and so was my ardent, tearful prayer !—I must believe it, dear friend. If I am to withstand all the temptations with which despair now assails me, I must believe firmly in a loving Father whose compassionate eye regards the sorrows of our feeble hearts, and whose paternal hand will one day reunite the bonds riven asunder by cruel death ! Oh, in the presence of the lifeless form of a being we have adored, what heart can feel so arid, what brain so hardened by doubt as not to reject for ever the hateful thought that such sacred words as God, justice, love, and immortality, are but empty sounds without any real existence !

Farewell, Paul. You know what still detains me here. If you are able to come, I shall expect you ; if not, dear friend, you must expect me. Farewell.

## CHAPTER IX.

*Letter from the Marquis de Malouet to M. Paul B—, Paris.*

Château de Malouet, October 20th.

SIR, I feel it a duty, no less imperative than painful, to recount to you the circumstances resulting in the catastrophe of which you were at once informed, and the news of which was conveyed as gently as the means of transit would permit ; we were already sorely tried, and are now overwhelmed by this last calamity. You are aware that a few weeks or days were all that Madame de Malouet and myself had required to make us know and esteem your friend, and feel for him an

enduring affection which was too soon to change to enduring regret.

I am not going to enter into the sad circumstances which preceded the fatal event. I know that you are acquainted with every stage of the fatal passion inspired in an unfortunate young lady by the merits and virtues of him whom we now deplore. I shall not touch on the distressing scenes which ensued upon the death of Madame de Palme. They are already half-deadened by a later sorrow.

M. George's conduct during these melancholy days, the keen sensibility which he exhibited throughout, combined with his high moral tone, completed his conquest over our hearts. I ought to have sent him off to you at once; I wished to remove him from this desolate spot and bring him to you myself, since you were detained in Paris by such sad reasons: but he considered it his duty not to forsake the unfortunate lady in her last resting-place so quickly.

We had brought him back to our house, and took all the care we could of him. He never left the château except to make his short pilgrimage each day. Yet his health visibly declined. The day before yesterday, Madame de Malouet urged him to accompany M. de Breuilly and myself, in a ride we were to take that morning. He consented, though with some reluctance, and off we set. As we rode along, he made every effort to respond to our attempts to draw him into conversation and cause him to forget his grief. I had just seen him smile for the first time for many hours, and was beginning to hope that time, aided by his own strength of mind and the care of his friends might help to soothe his memories of the past, when, at a turn of the road, a most unfortunate accident brought us face to face with M. de Maunterne.

This young man was on horseback, accompanied by two friends and two ladies. We were all going in the same direc-

tion, but his pace was more rapid than ours : he passed us with a bow, and I, for my part, noticed nothing in his manner to call for any remark. I was consequently much surprised to hear M. de Breuilly, the next moment, muttering between his teeth : " What infamous baseness ! "—

M. George, who had turned pale and looked the other way as the party passed, faced M. de Breuilly with flashing eyes ! " What do you mean, sir ? What are you speaking of ? " he exclaimed.

" Of the insolence of that coxcomb ! " calmly rejoined M. de Breuilly.

On hearing this reply, I interfered promptly, reproving M. de Breuilly for his quarrelsome tendencies, and affirming that there had not been the slightest trace of offence in either M. de Maunterne's attitude or countenance as he passed us.

" Why, my friend," resumed M. de Breuilly, " you must have had your eyes closed or you could not have helped seeing, as I did, how that wretched fellow sneered as he looked at our companion ! I don't know why you should wish him to brook an insult to which we ourselves would not submit ! " These unlucky words had scarcely passed M. de Breuilly's lips before M. George had galloped forward.

" Are you mad ? " said I to De Breuilly, as he tried to keep me back—" and what can be your object in inventing such stories ? "

" My good friend," was his answer, " that young man must be roused by any means in our power. "

I shrugged my shoulders, freed myself from his grasp, and dashed after M. George ; but, he had outstripped me considerably, being better mounted than myself. I was a hundred paces in the rear when he overtook M. de Maunterne, who had reined up on hearing him coming. They seemed to exchange a few words, and then I saw M. George's riding-

whip descend several times very smartly on M. de Manterne's face. M. de Breuilly and I only arrived just in time to prevent matters going further.

A meeting between these two gentlemen having unhappily become inevitable, we were obliged to take with us M. de Manterne's two friends, M. de Quiroy and Mr. Astley, the latter an Englishman. M. George rode on before us to the château. The choice of weapons belonged undoubtedly to our antagonist. Yet, having noticed that his seconds seemed to hesitate with a sort of indifference or circumspection, between the sword and pistol, I thought that by a little management we might lead them to choose the weapon that would be most to our advantage. We took care to consult M. George first, and he at once declared himself in favour of the sword.

"But you are a capital pistol-shot," remarked M. de Breuilly; "I have seen you shoot. Are you certain that you handle a sword still better? For heaven's sake, make no mistake, you are going to mortal combat!"

"I feel that," replied he, smiling; "but I have a decided preference for the sword, if possible."

After hearing this wish so strongly expressed, we could not but congratulate ourselves when this weapon was chosen. It was all settled, and the meeting fixed for nine o'clock the following morning.

Throughout the remainder of the day, M. George appeared so unabsorbed and at times even so merry that we were all surprised, and Madame de Malouet, who of course knew nothing of what had just happened, was especially at a loss to account for it. At ten o'clock he retired to his room, where I saw a light burning two hours after. Impelled by my strong affection and a vague sense of uneasiness, I entered his room towards midnight, and found him perfectly calm; he had been writing, and was sealing some envelopes: "Take

these!" said he, as he put the papers into my hand. "Now I have finished everything of importance," added he, "and I mean to sleep soundly."

I thought it incumbent on me to give him a few further technical instructions respecting the use of the weapon he was so soon to handle. He heard me absently, and then, suddenly holding out his arm, said: "Feel my pulse." I did so, and assured him that his calmness was no affectation, and that his high spirits were not the result of fever. "In my state," he went on to say, "there is no killing a man against his will. Good night, dear sir." I embraced him and left the room.

Yesterday morning, at half-past eight, M. George, M. de Breuille, and I repaired to a retired lane, half way between Malouet and Mauterne, where it had been arranged the duel should take place. Our antagonist arrived almost immediately, accompanied by M. de Quiroy and Mr. Astley. The nature of the insult precluded any attempt at reconciliation, and the duel at once commenced.

M. George had scarcely put himself on his defence, when his perfect inexperience in handling the sword became evident. M. de Breuille gave me a glance of stupefaction. Still, as the blades crossed, there was some show of thrust and parry, but at the third pass, M. George fell, pierced through the breast.

I rushed to him and found him dying. He pressed my hand feebly, smiled once more, and with his last breath gave me a parting message for you: "Tell Paul that I love him, that I forbid him to avenger me, that I die—happy." And thus he expired.

I shall add nothing to this story; it is too long already, and it has cost me a great effort to write so much; but I felt that I owed you this true and painful history. I have also taken for granted that your friendship would make you

wish to follow to the grave the remains of one whom you so truly loved. Now you know all and understand everything, down to my silence.

He is to be laid beside her. I feel sure that you will come, so we shall expect you. We will mourn together over these two loved beings, so good and so unselfish, both laid low by passion, and cut down so swiftly by the scythe of death when life seemed fairest.

THE END.